



Agency of the Year: Best Creative -- Agency.com

by Larry Dobrow, January 2006 issue

A MAGNIFICENT DIGITAL OBSESSION In the wake of the dotcom bust, any company that retained ".com" as part of its moniker -- Pets.com, we hardly knew ye -- was viewed with a mixture of pity and contempt. Of those that weren't shamed into dropping the suffix, few have thrived like Agency.com has. The self-described "digitally obsessed" shop grew both its service offerings and client roster in 2005, and is honored by OMMA for its scrappy creative prowess.

On the service front, Agency.com partnered with customer interaction shop Marketspace to explore online/offline pairings involving everything from kiosks to call centers. The firm also integrated its Web development and online ad groups, formerly known as iTraffic. But it was the depth and breadth of Agency.com's creative work on behalf of high-profile clients, including eBay and British Airways, that set it apart. As of early last month, the company had netted 26 new clients in 2005, including A-list brands like cnn.com, the Food Network, and Maidenform. It also expanded its relationships with British Airways, eBay, and Miller Brewing Co.

For eBay's high-profile "It" campaign, Agency.com created online units to highlight the teaser campaign of unbranded testimonials ("I even trained my dog to fetch It"). Users who clicked on those units were vaulted to www.whatis-it.com, where they could customize their own "It."

For the campaign's second phase, Agency.com created Flash ads touting a range of products; when visitors rolled over them, they could see how many of those products were available on eBay at that very moment and the auction's starting price. A second ad featured a father within an ad unit, tossing -- what else? -- an "It" to his son, who "stood" atop the page content.

For British Airways' "Go With Those Who Know" push, Agency.com worked with the airline's offline agency on a campaign featuring a bevy of out-of-home placements in New York City. Each of the ads featured definitions of British vernacular, such as, "SHOUT. In London, 'Shout' means 'I'm buying' in pubs like this one." Agency.com created online landing pages for each of the 60-odd terms. From those pages, users could send either an e-mail or text message that employed the British "word of the day" in a humorous context. Agency.com also created banner ads featuring the word of the day, which updated automatically to deliver subsequent words across all placements.

Animal Planet's "Dragons: A Fantasy Made Real" posed a different challenge: to generate enthusiasm for the two-hour special among two distinct audiences: six- to 11-year-old kids and 25- to 44-year-old sci-fi buffs. To ape the show's if-dragons-really-existed premise, Agency.com designed ad units that teased potential viewers with glimpses of digitally enhanced footage. For the younger audience (to which 40 percent of the media budget was devoted), interactive games were created for mainstream destinations like Nick.com and Neopets.com.

For older viewers, Agency.com went the niche route, targeting fantasy and gaming sites, as well as "Lord of the Rings" and "Dungeons & Dragons" user groups. The result: more than three million viewers tuned into the first airing of "Dragons: A Fantasy Made Real," the largest audience for any Animal Planet program in its history.