

San Fernando Valley Business Journal

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Arresting Mediafish Ads Reel In Sheriff's Recruits

By Mark R. Madler - 6/25/2007

San Fernando Valley Business Journal Staff

Now for some non-Paris Hilton related news from the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department.

West Hills-based advertising firm Mediafish Creative developed an arresting campaign for the department to attract new recruits to fill its ranks.

Since taking on the sheriff's account in May 2006, the advertising firm created new billboards, radio spots and other methods to capture the attention of the key demographic – males ages 18 to 35 – who are most likely to be interested in a career in law enforcement.

Mediafish did this by getting local sports stars Nomar Garciaparra of the Dodgers and Jordan Farmer of the Lakers to appear in ads with actual sheriff's deputies; with signs at Dodger Stadium; and using a car wrap on a police cruiser to take to job fairs. To capture the Asian market, the firm hired action movie star Jackie Chan to appear in a video.

"If you are driving in South Central and there is a billboard of Sheriff Lee Baca, it's not going to hit that demographic," said Robb Friedman, one of three partners at Mediafish. "But if there is a picture of Jordan Farmer, that community and age group is going to be excited and look at the billboard."

The sheriff's department budgeted \$2 million for recruitment for the 2006/07 fiscal year. At the end of last year, 1,106 new deputies had been hired. The target for this year is 1,300, a goal that should be realized, said Lt. Joe Stephens, who heads recruitment for the department.

Mediafish was one of 14 agencies bidding for the department's business; and one of five that gave presentations on the work it would do.

Friedman met his business partners Nalin Desilva, the art director, and Patricia Fernandez, the creative director, when all three attended the graphic design program at California State University, Northridge.

The department found the firm's ads appealing, Stephens said, and Friedman and his team got him and others in the department to think about color schemes and the creative component that goes into advertising.

"We are layman," Stephens added. "It's always good to bring professionals to the table to enhance what we already have."

As with other large clients it does work for – including Countrywide Home Loans and NBC Universal in the Valley – Mediafish treats the sheriff's department like a brand.

That brand gets blended in with the idea that the men and women serving in the ranks are like everyone else and could be your husband, uncle or neighbor.

The agency summed it up with the slogan, "Real People, Real Leaders."

"The whole campaign was to make the deputies everyday people," Friedman said.

Prior to 2004, the department had never used an advertising agency to bring in new hires. But like many other law enforcement agencies in Southern California and the nation, the LASD faces a shrinking pool of applicants and increased competition. A simple ad in police publications just won't cut it when many job seekers do research on the Internet.

In its presentation to the department, Mediafish emphasized what it could do with a Web site to get more page hits and is currently designing a new recruitment site, Friedman said.

The department surveys every person who tests to become deputy and all callers to its recruiting center and found that while some saw the billboards or the Fox Television reality show "The Academy," most followed up after viewing information on the Internet, Stephens said.

Bidding with eBay

A meeting at an advertising convention last fall in New York has led to a partnership between Encino-based reverse auction firm Bid4Spots and online auction behemoth eBay to sell unused radio airtime.

Bid4Spots chief Dave Newmark called it a "timing is everything" moment as eBay was looking to launch an online marketplace to sell television advertising but that the process was going slowly.

Enter Newmark and his two-year old company and its more than 2,000 radio stations from markets all across the country. A different medium, yes, but much easier to put in place.

The first online auctions including advertisers registered with eBay began earlier this month.

The partnership puts eBay into direct competition with Google, which also recently expanded into radio advertising.

"In a nutshell, they had the advertisers and we had the stations," Newmark said. "It seemed like a perfect match."

In Bid4Spots' reverse auction method, radio stations bid against each other to get business from advertisers for last minute air time. Advertisers provide the amount they are willing to pay in a silent auction process held online.

The eBay deal is another large step in the expansion of the company that Newmark started in 2005 as a side business to his advertising firm.

In January, Bid4Spots took its reverse auction method to Internet radio; and this year opened an office in the United Kingdom to capture that market.

Newmark credits the success and rapid growth of Bid4Spots to a background in media rather than in technology.

Companies with a technology background are handicapped because they are not thinking in the way that media buyers and sellers think, Newmark said.

New Hire at Inter/Media

Inter/Media's Interactive business unit brought on board U.S. Army veteran Donald Lee as an advertising Web site and Flash designer.

At the Encino-based Inter/Media Group, Lee rejoins Todd Geller who hired Lee as a designer at Reunion.com where Geller served as media director.

From his experience, Lee said that clients sometimes do not understand that advertising online is a different beast from advertising in print.

With a print ad, one wants something easy on the eyes and that doesn't always translate on the Web, said soft-spoken Lee, a graduate of Brooks College in Long Beach.

"You can have a real sexy ad online and it won't work," Lee said "But you can put up a plain Jane ad and it outperforms anything that's pleasing to the eye."

When it comes to the Internet, a person's attention span is different, Lee added. With print, a reader is already paying attention to what is on the page whereas online you have five to six seconds to catch the attention of the user, he said.

Lee enlisted in the Army following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and was a member of the Rangers from 2002 to 2005. He served in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2003 and 2004 as a forward observer with 2d Ranger Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment.

Staff Reporter Mark Madler can be reached at (818) 316-3126 or by e-mail at mmadler@sfvbj.com.