

## **A Media-Agnostic, Judging Campaigns of Others**

*Louise Story*

IT takes a bit of courage, and perhaps a lot of ego, to tell large companies that their ad campaigns have been failing miserably.

But that's exactly what the advertising firm Naked claims to do regularly.

"We get up in front of a group of agencies and tell them, very nicely, that they have wasted tens of millions of dollars," said Ben Richards, senior strategist at Naked New York.

For that advice, of course, Naked hopes to earn a chunk of the supposedly wasted money. The company specializes in helping a client select the right balance of media for its message — shifting away, perhaps, from television and toward the Internet, or ads inside stores, or in other directions.

Naked is one of the specialists in an emerging area in marketing called communications planning, which tries to look beyond the 30-second spot to new ways to reach potential customers. The company, which started in 2000 in London and opened a New York office two years ago, was acquired by the Photon Group, an Australian ad holding company, in February.

In the last year, Naked New York has signed up several large clients, including Kimberly-Clark, Coca-Cola and Johnson & Johnson.

Unlike many ad agencies, Naked does not create ads or purchase the space for them from media companies. Executives at Naked say that they are "media neutral," meaning that they are indifferent to where the advertising dollars of their clients are spent; this, they say, distinguishes them from agencies that might tend to steer clients toward television, for example.

"We do not have any predisposition to recommend any channel," said Paul Woolmington, a founding partner of Naked New York. "That is something that cannot be underestimated."

Naked usually does not replace a company's lineup of creative agencies and media buyers. Instead, Naked works like a consulting firm, advising how to use the regular agencies.

And it may cut into the revenue of traditional agencies. Kimberly-Clark, for example, did not increase what it spends on ad agencies to pay for Naked. Instead, the company is reallocating the spending, said Hedy Lukas, vice president for integrated marketing at Kimberly-Clark.

Naked's financial success is in part driven by the success of its clients. The firm often derives part of its compensation from whether its strategies translate into higher sales. That marks an important departure from the typical pay model in advertising, which is based on producing ads or placing them in particular media.

"We believe in being mutually invested with our clients," Mr. Woolmington said.

He uses words like "transformation" and "movement" to describe Naked's work. The firm has even published a limited-edition book with a list of its principles, called "naked truths." The people who work at Naked are "brilliant misfits" who want to "liberate marketing," he said.

Kimberly-Clark, for example, hired Naked to manage its marketing planning late last fall. The packaged goods giant wanted to rethink the way it sold brands like Kleenex, Cottonelle, Huggies and Scott.

In February, Naked met with the Kimberly-Clark team assigned to Depend adult diaper products. The session revealed internal tension: some team members thought Depend needed to move away from its image as a product for elderly, often bedridden people, and others

thought Depend should not worry about how young people might perceive the brand, said Pete Sawin, the marketing director for Depend.

During the session with Naked, the team reached agreement that it should not reposition the brand, Mr. Sawin said. The consensus was to focus squarely on what potential customers think, not the entire population.

"There is a stigma of aging in Western culture," Mr. Sawin said. "We're not going to be able to change that."

Naked's strategy for Kimberly-Clark will not be used until 2009, so it will take a while for the results to roll in. But Ms. Lukas of Kimberly-Clark said that Naked's executives were more willing than others to think of unusual places to advertise.

"This is a pretty rare discovery, this discovery of being media-agnostic in the planning cycle and not presuming that you have to have a 30-second TV spot," Ms. Lukas said.

Naked starts most of its work by using what it calls the "big tool," a 50-question survey that tries to pinpoint the client's priorities and problems. The answers are fed into a computer program to produce a list of 80 media options, ranked from most to least effective for that client's goals. Naked then compares that ranking with the client's current spending.

Naked's findings from the big tool can have a strong impact on how large advertisers spend their money. Two years ago, Naked advised Boots, the British pharmacy chain, to get rid of all of its television ads for prescription services. Boots had been running prime-time television spots to encourage people to register for the services, and Naked advised it to spend that money instead on signs in its stores and incentives for its staff to sign people up.

On the other hand, for Honda in Britain, Naked recommended a boost in television advertising.

Naked executives say they have benefited from the major changes in media and advertising that have made it more difficult for advertisers to reach consumers. But what if a new advertising paradigm emerges that achieves the dominance that television once had?

"I honestly don't think we will get to a point where we will reach a new equilibrium," Mr. Woolmington said. "It looks like the digital age means that change is constant."

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