

Hot digital shop hops across the Atlantic

Megan McIlroy

Profero opens U.S. office despite economy, betting spend will remain strong

Profero, one of the hottest digital shops in the U.K., is expanding into North America this month with a New York outpost. The agency brings a growing list of U.S. clients, including Colgate-Palmolive, Johnson & Johnson and Western Union, along with a global network of about 400 employees, with nine offices spanning Europe and Asia.

Started 10 years ago in London by two brothers, Daryl and Wayne Arnold, Profero is the latest in a string of U.K. digital agencies to set up shop here. (Other recent arrivals include Poke and search specialist Steak.)

Given the state of the U.S. economy, it seems like a questionable time to wade in. But Wayne Arnold, CEO of the agency's North American operations, said he's confident digital spending is going to remain strong in the coming months, because web campaigns are more responsive than other types of media. "The areas where we are looking to attract clients will still grow in the next 12 to 24 months, even if the economy slows down," he said.

Profero built out its Asian network before coming to the U.S., betting five years ago that the key growth markets for Fortune 100 companies were going to be there, especially in China and India. "We saw an opportunity to build a market-leading offering there first and then open in North America," Mr. Arnold said. Of course, he is also counting on the agency's knowledge of those markets as a new-business tool for his New York office, with an ever-increasing raft of U.S. marketers seeking to understand the dynamics of the Asian market and learn to localize campaigns there.

Profero is independent and still privately owned by Mr. Arnold and his brother, with other agency executives as shareholders. It brings in annual revenue of about \$25 million.

The plan, the brothers said, is to remain independent, and Profero doesn't see itself making any major acquisitions of its own, unlike top competitor AKQA. "We still believe we have the energy to drive the business forward," Mr. Arnold said. "Never say never, but [an acquisition] is not part of our five-year strategy."

Another thing the agency believes: Media and creative must be under the same roof to create effective marketing. Given that orientation, it's no surprise that some of Profero's best work blurs the line between media and creative. Last year the agency won the gold cyber Lion at Cannes for a teaser campaign it did for Mini.

Inspired by Alice in Wonderland and "The Matrix," the campaign, dubbed "Follow the White Rabbit," sought to match the Mini brand with a sense of adventure. With a white Mini as their guide, web surfers were taken to websites they might not normally visit through a virtual porthole. The campaign was unconventional in terms of online advertising because the only thing branded Mini was the car itself.

Profero has already launched some work in the U.S., including a campaign for Johnson's Baby Lotion. The ad features an interactive game of peekaboo with a baby that demonstrates how mothers can tell if they are bonding with their children. It drives users to the J&J site to get more information.

"Consumer behavior is changing demonstratively," Mr. Arnold said. "All clients share a common theme, which is: How the hell do we get the message to these consumers when they are spending less time listening to us?"

Disponível em: <<http://www.ebscohost.com>>. Acesso em 12/5/2008.