

GREAT MINDS DON'T THINK ALIKE

Seven years ago, Andrew Deitchman, chief executive and co-founder of Mother New York, decided to start a gourmet hot dog business selling dogs prepared 'the French way' - inside a toasted baguette. He bought a cart, set it up in Bleecker Park and employed someone to man it.

"It drove my partners nuts, because we'd just started the company," recalls Deitchman. "But it was fun to do and I learned a lot about how to run a small business, which is not easy." The Dogmatic brand was later sold to an investor and is now a 'real' restaurant in Manhattan.

Wieners with a whiskey chaser

Such 'adventures' have become an intrinsic part of Mother New York's business. Under the Mother Ventures arm, run by Deitchman, the agency creates, markets and supports products and projects as wide ranging as White Pike whiskey or a soon-to-launch social media app. "It's stuff people are really passionate about, and we treat it like any other project - but client work gets priority," explains Deitchman, who describes himself as a serial entrepreneur. "Part of the reason for starting Mother was to do things like this."

Making whiskey and wieners may not seem like textbook moves when trying to build an internationally successful ad agency, but doing things a bit differently has come to define Mother New York. It's fitting, then, that Deitchman, who co-founded the agency in 2003 with Paul Malmstrom, Linus Karlsson and Rob DeFlorio, is an unconventional exec. Bearded, with goofy oversized glasses, he wears a cardigan, rather than a suit, and has a laid-back friendly manner.

Following his father into advertising ("either a lack of ambition or destiny") the first decade

Clients with direct access to creatives, no credits on work, and launching a gourmet hot dog business at the same time as a new agency... Andrew Deitchman, chief executive and co-founder of Mother New York, believes in doing things differently. He gives Sarah Shearman his recipe for future-proofing a brand in an increasingly fractured market

of his career proved very different from the latter. He landed his first job at Ammirati & Puris, then agency-hopped, working in seven different roles across a variety of disciplines, including planning, consultancy and account management. All the agencies he passed through (including Euro RSCG, Siegel+Gale and Saatchi & Saatchi) had something in common: an entrepreneurial spirit and "winning culture".

He got noticed in the early years for speaking his mind. "I was a bit precocious. So much of what excited me about the business was the content, what we experience as consumers - so I thought, why can't I have an opinion?" It was while working as business development director for WPP's Red Cell Network in London that he got to know the founders of Mother and the opportunity to launch in New York arose. "It should have been the most

anxious part of my career. I should have been scared, but I was the most relaxed I had ever been," he recalls.

The founders inherited a "cherished" brand with a great reputation, but the Mother London partners gave them a blank sheet when it came to deciding what kind of agency it would be. "It was a bold move," given the scale of the US market, Deitchman says. "It was also really liberating."

It's about more than the money

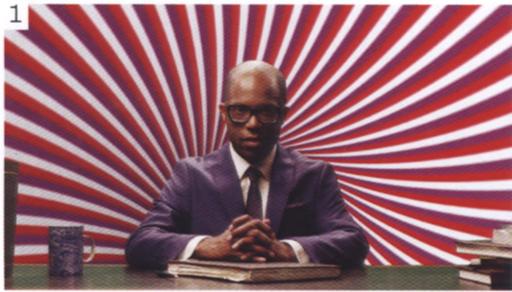
Rather than starting with a fully-formed vision, the agency, which employs around 150 staff and is about to celebrate its 10th anniversary, has developed around a set of values. "We always set out to create an environment and culture that great thinkers want to be part of," Deitchman explains. "We want people who are working at Mother to love being part of it and not separate out their work life from their 'life' life. We want them to bring their whole selves to work and feel very connected to the brand."

This home-from-home culture is reflected in the agency's aesthetic. The warehouse-like exterior of their Hell's Kitchen office space belies the cosy interior. Framed photos of every member of

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staff's mother adorn the walls, as they do in London, and a stuffed bear stands by the entrance, inviting a hug. The bar, with client Stella on tap, is decked out like a kitchen. Even the boardroom has a homely feel, with a lumpy retro-style sofa. "We're called Mother for a reason, and we try to live up to our name," says Deitchman.

In an industry that's experiencing huge disruption and a flurry of mergers and acquisitions - Mother in the UK recently sold its stake in digital agency Poke to Publicis - can the New York agency stay independent forever? "Yes, that's the plan," asserts Deitchman, resolutely.

He explains that, historically, the blueprint for success in the industry was "essentially guys building up companies based on their personalities, selling them, then walking away with a lot of money. But we're not driven by how much money we can make, or how fast we can build up the company and sell it," he explains. "We've tried to build a collective, and have the brand stand for something bigger than the name on the door."

Completely up in the air

As well as independence, subverting the traditional hierarchy is another value Mother holds dear. (Although Deitchman appreciates the irony of making this claim while being interviewed as the subject of a profile piece.) There are no VPs, SVPs or directors at the agency, and no personal names in credits for work. This makes competing for talent tougher, however, as Deitchman admits. "Getting a title or credit feels good. We're taking a very big weapon out of our arsenal for recruitment and retention, but the benefit is people love working here."

Mother also breaks with convention by not having traditional account management-type roles. If a client wants to speak directly to a creative or strategist on the team, they can. "I was a bit nervous when we started it, and there are some clients that want to feel protected from the creative process. But as long as we get the work done, our clients are happy." Some of Mother's



1/2/3/4 Virgin Mobile, Blinkwashing

larger clients, like Burger King, Mondelez and Diageo, also work with other agencies with more formal structures, but Mother's alternative set-up has managed to succeed with them so far.

The agency wants to differentiate itself from the pack by producing work that has never been done before and coming up with ideas that take on a life of their own. As an example, Deitchman cites the latest instalment of Virgin Mobile USA's Retrain your Brain campaign, a YouTube video that uses interactive 'blinkwashing' technology, changing scene every time the viewer blinks.

But with the latest technology informing so much of Mother's creative work, does Deitchman fear that big data could at some stage kill the big idea? "I don't think robots will replace humans in terms of how to inspire people. I think agencies will need to do more and storytelling will be more important. People are going to forget that real-world conversations can still guide product design and brand communication."

Often described as 'media-agnostic', Mother New York doesn't fit easily into the regular categories, which, given the increasing level of integration in the industry, is perhaps a sign

of the times. Deitchman describes this as the "media singularity", explaining that the media and advertising industries are collapsing in on themselves, with publishers now offering creative services, brands evolving into entertainment platforms and agencies seeking to become brand owners themselves.

This means Mother New York finds itself pitching against a wide array of firms these days, from McCann to McKinsey, Pentagram to Conde Nast. "It's an incredible time right now, where everything is just completely up in the air. Agencies and firms are being fractured and reframed and there are tons of opportunities being created for business."

Home with Mother

So where does Mother position itself in the midst of all this shape-shifting? "We talk about ourselves as a modern creative company. What we have tried to do is have people at the centre who are generalist thinkers, makers and problem-solvers, informed by excellence in a handful of disciplines."

It seems as though Deitchman's career has panned out like the love life of a serial dater, who eventually finds 'the one' and settles down. And while Deitchman still moonlights in the start-up world, going for lots of dinners and meetings with entrepreneurs and sitting on advisory boards, it seems he has truly built a home with Mother. "I just want to keep my brain happy and be part of running a company that inspires people - and I think I've done that."

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