



# Industry Insights

## How Small Agencies Win Big at The Show

By Marlys Tamte

**W**ith over 250 pages in this year's Show book, there's no doubt about the amount of top-notch creative produced in the Twin Cities ad market. Judges awarded a record number of pushpins at The 2002 Show in October to creative leaders such as Carmichael Lynch, Periscope, Clarity Coverdale Fury, Kerker, Peterson Miller Hooks and The Cat Farm.

The Cat Farm?

A handful of very small and relatively new agencies walked away with gold, silver, and bronze awards at this year's Show. Granted, this is not a unique occurrence, but given that many ad-related companies are struggling just to survive, the presence of these agencies at The Show piqued my curiosity.

How does a small rookie agency with limited resources, in a terrible economy for advertising, compete on a creative level with the big guys and walk away a winner?

I put that question to five small, relatively new winning agencies. Searching for common themes, I asked what they think and do to create advertising recognized as the best. It didn't take long to find those themes.

### The Right Client

Billy Jurewicz of Space 150 sees a mix of clients as key to winning awards. "We find clients who help build our business, and short term projects that are purely for other kinds of ROI—the creative opportunity, the awards, the reputation in the community and ability to recruit good people that awards bring," he says.

One and All took pushpins for five of six campaigns submitted to The Show, and partner Tom Nowak gives a great deal of credit to their clients. "We look for good chemistry with clients who want strong creative. We also focus on consumer versus the traditional or b-to-b clients that most small agencies get."

### The Agency/Client Relationship

How an agency works with the client has a big impact on the creative outcome.

MoToR's John Henning lays out the creative ground rules at the first meeting with the client. "I say the tough things at first, when it's funny: MoToR doesn't cede creative control to the client. I'd rather be the bad guy now than later when the spot runs and is unsuccessful. It isn't difficult to do good work, but to get the client to see your point is. We agree to a strategy, and then I have creative control."

One And All's name came from its philosophy of client and creative team involvement. "The work is not done in isolation, everyone is involved—the account planners, AEs, clients. In most agencies, if you're the AE you don't get to be part of the creative work," says Nowak. "Usually there's a handoff and no client involvement, and the creative is 5% off because there's something the client didn't convey."

A collaborative philosophy works for One And All "because we're informal, down-to-earth, and we enjoy the process," reports Nowak. "It's an enjoyable situation for the clients, and we can do it because we're small."

Rob Dalton of Dalton Advertising agrees. "When you get big, you have to compartmentalize. When you're small you get face-to-face time with the client, and we see that as a good thing. We rely a lot on input from our clients. We don't keep them at arms length. We get a lot of insights from our clients. We get a lot of passion, too—nobody's more passionate about their products than the client."

The Cat Farm's Jeremy Winter believes passion, talent, and opportunity are key to working at the same level as a big agency. In an environment where creative is king "anybody can do great work on any piece of business in any media. We work really closely with clients and let them get involved and feel they have equity. They feel better about the process, about being more creative."

### Creative Philosophy

Nowak's philosophy sums it up best. "The best work is conceptual, simple. People can get it."

Henning adds that "it takes a long time to make an idea simple. The simpler the idea, the more the idea will sell. If you throw five tennis balls, your reader can't catch any. One tennis ball can be easily caught."

"It's not about writing a cool headline. It's about laying down the groundwork and developing a brilliant strategy, and then backing it up with a great execution," says Dalton. "Our standards are as high as any big agency in town."

Winter adds "if you have focused, strong positioning, everything else falls out of it and creative can be judged against it. Everything supports and conveys that positioning, right down to the business card and the doormat."

Jurewicz views great creative as an outcome of trust and empowerment. "When you start winning awards it's because you allow people to trust themselves. My players should all be better than me. I let them get up on stage and perform, but I don't tell them how to perform."

### The Fallon connection?

Although we don't have a statistically valid trend, one last commonality can't be ignored. Four of the five people interviewed had their roots at Fallon. "We got religion there" says Jurewicz.

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