

Vancouver will still have a Blast, buyer says

Marketing firm's new parent says name, employees and management team all stay

Marke Andrews, Vancouver Sun

Published: Thursday, October 25, 2007

If you're going to get swallowed by a dragon, make sure the dragon has some fire.

That was the case Wednesday when Vancouver-based interactive marketing firm Blast Radius was bought by international conglomerate WPP. Whereas Blast Radius had good numbers -- 350 employees, six offices in four countries, and revenues of \$41.8 million Cdn in 2006 -- new parent WPP has more than 100,000 employees, 2,000 offices in 106 countries, and 2006 revenues of \$11.7 billion Cdn.

Blast Radius will be aligned with WPP's Wunderman, one of the largest marketing networks in the world with more than 100 international offices.

"We certainly felt Wunderman has a core in direct marketing, a clear intimacy with customer data, and customer insights and marketing results," said Gurval Caer, president and CEO of Blast Radius, from the company's Homer Street headquarters.

Caer said that as far back as mid-2006 the Blast board of directors, in their strategic planning, deduced that as Internet marketing grew over the next few years, the company "had to evolve, become more global, complement some of our own skill sets with other skill sets that we didn't have.

"Partnering with Wunderman would be the very best answer to evolve and deliver the type of services we want for our clients over the next three or four years," said Caer.

Blast Radius will retain its name, its full management team, and all of its 350 employees (including sales staff), 180 of whom are located in Vancouver.

"We will continue to be who we are and partner with others to come to our clients with broader solutions and a greater global reach," said Caer, whose clients include Nike and Starbucks.

David Sable, COO of Wunderman, concurred that there will be no changes in staff or operations at the Vancouver company.

"Many companies will buy a company like Blast and change the name, and change a lot of other things," said Sable, over the phone from New York City. "We think that's a mistake. We bought them for a particular reason."

Not making changes, Sable says, "allows us to keep [that company's] power and keep the culture, and it allows us to learn. We add to their culture and they add to our culture."

Wunderman has been expanding its network in the past year, purchasing digital companies Aqua Online, based in South Africa, and Belgium-based These Days, as well as taking controlling interest in U.S. data company DataCore Marketing.

Sable said the purchase of Blast Radius followed a "long courting period" involving dinners and long talks involving himself, Caer and Wunderman CEO Daniel Morel. He feels Blast Radius is a perfect fit for the network.

"[Blast] is the right size, they have a client list that is blue-chip, and they have a great reputation in the market," said Sable.

Two weeks ago, Blast Radius received a social marketing award from Forrester Research for its Nike Jordan Brand campaign. The Vancouver office came up with the Breakfast Club, a basketball network where individuals can create training programs, trade training ideas and hear from celebrated coaches in their pursuit of improving basketball skills.

"It was an innovative way for [Nike] Jordan to engage with its customers," said Caer.

mandrews@png.canwest.com