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GroupM Restructures Search, Integrates 24/7 Real Media's Decide DNA

by Tameka Kee, Friday, Feb 15, 2008 8:00 AM ET

WPP'S GROUPM IS SET TO restructure the search practice across Mediaedge:cia, MediaCom and MindShare (and to a lesser extent MAXUS), rolling out branded search divisions at each agency, and integrating 24/7 Real Media's proprietary bid management technology in the process.

GroupM's branded search firm Outrider, which began providing resources to all three agencies in April 2007, will remain semi-independent under the leadership of CEO Chris Copeland--with a continued focus on serving non-GroupM clients like AstraZeneca and fellow WPP agencies like JWT or Y&R.

Staff members of the new divisions, dubbed MEC Search, MediaCom Search and MindShare Search, will work closely with traditional and interactive media planners and buyers at their offices around the globe, with the initial focus on North American clients. The goal is to develop a search offering that bears a unified GroupM "signature," but also allows each agency to customize it to deliver solid results, said GroupM Interaction Worldwide CEO Rob Norman.

"We intend to have one GroupM way of attacking the problems of search --including staff development," Norman told *Online Media Daily*. "With unified tools and training, we can optimize both the quality and the amount of time spent on search campaigns, and take any client confusion out of the picture."

As part of the shuffle, the search groups will all gain access to Decide DNA, 24/7 Real Media's proprietary bid management platform. The platform complements Outrider's in-house campaign management and reporting technology, and will better equip each agency's search brand to optimize campaigns in multiple languages--as Decide DNA can support double-byte languages like Chinese and Japanese.

"Most search has been bought locally across GroupM, but now we're starting to see demand on wider scale and Dell is a manifestation of that global reach," Norman said. "Prior to Dell,

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we had some capabilities in Australia and consulting in Singapore, but with 24/7 we can have a realistic reach into search in Asia-- particularly Japan, Korea and China."

Norman was quick to assert that the search capabilities were the only kinds of services that GroupM would absorb from 24/7 Real Media, which WPP acquired in mid-2007. "We want to keep things clear for 24/7 Real Media's clients that the Open AdStream technology and the Global Web Alliance will stay within their ecosystem," Norman said. "It's the search people and platform that will be moving into GroupM."

GroupM will now have more than 400 dedicated search employees under its umbrella, a team that Copeland said will likely increase by 50% in the coming months. In addition to key "agency leads" that will be responsible for quality assurance in each division, there will also be room to appoint specialists for mobile, social media and multimedia search, he said. "Our goal is to create a group of search experts that can bring together best practices, thought leadership and demonstrate why search is a core piece of the overall communications planning and buying strategy," Copeland said.

In addition, Boston-based Catalyst Online and Germany-based Quisma, two of WPP's other search acquisitions, will also move under GroupM's search umbrella, although they will retain their independent brands and client rosters.

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