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GroupM Search Emerges As Industry's Biggest Player

by Joe Mandese, Friday, Feb 15, 2008 8:00 AM ET

WPP GROUP, ALREADY MADISON AVENUE'S largest buyer of search advertising with disparate operations housed within its Mindshare, Mediaedge:cia, MediaCom media networks, and its Outrider search specialty unit, is reorganizing its search operations to create centers of excellence to service clients across all four of those units. The move follows the acquisition of 24/7 Real Media, which itself had a considerable search practice, as well as a state-of-the-art bid management system, Decide DNA, that is being incorporated across the GroupM units in a loose confederation that will be known as GroupM Search.

The move, months in the making, also follows some considerable new business wins from huge search advertisers such as AT&T, Dell and Monster.com that likely double what was already an impressive search advertising market share.

During a speech at an investor's conference in New York last December WPP chief Martin Sorrell disclosed that WPP was spending an estimated \$200 million annually on Google alone, making it the search giant's No. 1 agency customer (only electronic retailers Amazon.com and eBay are bigger), and while GroupM executives would not disclose their new billings base for *Online Media Daily*, they said the head count for the combined search organization is now more than 400 people, which is believed to be the biggest in the world.

The new search organization redistributed the search experts and expertise of 24/7 Real Media across MindShare, MEC, MediaCom, and also Maxus in the markets where it is fully operational, as well as Outrider.

The branded media networks will focus on servicing their accounts, while Outrider will act as a neutral, third-party search operation for handling clients unaffiliated with the WPP shops. The GroupM Search organization will also include other search specialty agencies such as Catalyst Online, Quisma.

Specialty advertising centers for specific WPP clients, such as the

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so-called Da Vinci Project for Dell, will have their search practices managed through their affiliated agencies. In the case of Da Vinci, it will be MediaCom.

Joe Mandese is Editor of MediaPost.

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