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Third Annual Yahoo Searchlight Awards Happen Against Surreal Backdrop

As Yahoo was apparently [laying off](#) its promised 1,000 workers today I was at the Time-Life Building in New York as a panelist for the third [Yahoo Searchlight Awards](#). I've had the honor to be a part of this event since its inception in 2005 and think it's a terrific opportunity for ad agencies to showcase and share best practices about search, display and integrated ad campaigns.

In the three years of Searchlight the campaigns have become dramatically more sophisticated and inventive. The four finalists (out of a total of 40 entries) were the following agencies and their clients:

- Carat – Reebok Run Easy
- Outrider – Diageo Smirnoff Ice and Smirnoff Raw Tea Summer
- Resolution Media - FEDEX SuperBowl 2007
- Digitas – The Members Project (American Express)

The winner was Outrider for Smirnoff. At the center of the campaign was a [humorous mock-rap video](#) featuring East Coast preppies. The search aspect of the campaign cleverly negotiated the problem of avoiding exposure to under-age users and Google's ban on alcohol advertising.

Rob Norman, CEO of GroupM Interaction Worldwide, gave the opening keynote and thanked Yahoo for its pioneering work in online advertising. He made some eloquent and insightful remarks about the Internet as an ad medium and gave a good talk overall. But he also expressed the desire that this event not be the last Yahoo Searchlight Award and named the issue on everyone's mind: the apparently impending acquisition of Yahoo by Microsoft.

Through research, agency outreach and events like Searchlight, Yahoo has done considerable "heavy lifting" in educating marketers and ad agencies about the importance of search and, more broadly, integrated campaigns. Google and to a lesser degree Microsoft are now reaping the benefits of some of that work.

If Microsoft does acquire Yahoo, it would be wise to preserve the event (the brainchild of Yahoo Search Marketing Executive Ron Belanger) and the industry forum it has created.