

PHOENIX Business Journal

Phoenix PR, advertising agencies taking different roads to new normal



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Beau Lane is getting into Hispanic and digital marketing for his clients. Scott Harkey and Matthew Owens opened a new office in Santa Monica aimed at landing big fish in California. Aric Zion boasts that he and his business-partner wife both have MBA and business backgrounds not enjoyed by their industry rivals.

All are principals of advertising and public relations firms in the Phoenix market. Like their industry colleagues, they are rebooting their business models in the wake of the recession and the collapse of the real estate market, which was their bread and butter.

Much of that work disappeared during the economic tsunami and the resulting decline in tourism business. That left some real estate-dependent firms on the rocks and prompted others to take myriad paths to rejigger their business plans in an effort to rebound.

Lane is CEO of the E.B. Lane advertising agency in Phoenix. The 50-year-old company had billings of \$85 million last year and is one of the largest ad players in Arizona. Its clients include the Arizona Lottery, Harkins Theatres and the Arizona Cardinals.

Lane said the new economic and advertising terrain has shifted his focus to digital marketing and advertising.

"Digital is a major emphasis," he said.

E.B. Lane also is pumping up its efforts on the multicultural and Hispanic marketing front. The Hispanic demographic is, of course, big in Arizona and Western markets and growing nationwide.

Traditionally, local ad agencies have paid less attention to the Hispanic market. However, Lane said 50 percent of the youth demographic in Arizona is Hispanic, and that number is increasing.



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Lane recently hired Joe Ray as vice president for multicultural marketing. He's a marketing and ad industry veteran with expertise in the Hispanic market.

E.B. Lane also acquired Denver-based HenryGill Communications in 2011, establishing a beachhead in Colorado and creating what Lane hopes is a more solidified Rocky Mountain regional focus.

Jason Rose's Scottsdale PR firm also went the acquisition route, snagging Prime 3 Communication in 2010 and bringing in events manager Jennifer Stringfellow-Moser as a partner. He said he hopes to build the event business of Rose & Moser & Allen.

Value play in LA

While Lane digs for gold in Denver, Phoenix-based Owens Harkey Associates is mining for bigger clients in the Los Angeles area.

The ad agency opened a sales office in Santa Monica in January.

Partner Scott Harkey said his firm's goal is to tout high-quality work to California and national clients that can be done less expensively in Phoenix than on the coasts.

"I think the talent in Phoenix advertising is just as good as other markets," he said. "That's a huge value play."

Harkey sees promise in going after large markets. He and partner Owens also are looking at entering Texas, Chicago and the East Coast.

"I don't understand going to a market smaller than Phoenix," he said.

The firm had billings of \$18.5 million last year and 17 employees. Owens Harkey does 80 percent of its work in its home state now, but Harkey said he'd like to secure more outside work.



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The first 5 minutes

While the economic turmoil took a toll on many local advertising and PR executives, Aric Zion insists his Tempe-based firm was not one of the casualties.

He and his wife, DuGue, are the principals of Zion & Zion. Zion said most ad and PR agency owners come from creative backgrounds and aren't as in tune with concepts such as return on investment, cost efficiencies, inventories and sales volume.

"Our people generally understand the business side," he said.

He tries to impress that on clients and prospects "within the first 5 minutes" of talking to them.

Zion also said his agency will take on smaller clients that other agencies often eschew. If a smaller business is profitable and growth-oriented he will take it on as client.

Zion has billings of \$23.5 million and nearly 30 employees. The agency expects to build its workforce by 50 percent this year, hiring more senior and experienced professionals.

The Tempe agency recently hired Bridgette Zellmann as media director and Jennifer Spangler as a senior account executive. Both previously were with Phoenix-based Lavidge Co., which Zion said produces a lot of business-savvy PR talent.



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