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Designs on Growth - 8/25/2008

Designs on Growth

Haneke Design helps clients use type, photos and infographics to tell their story more effectively and make more money.

COMPANIES by Dave Szymanski | Tampa Bay Editor

Successful chief executives know that growing a business includes adjusting to meet customers' changing needs.

Jody Haneke, 34, chief executive officer and founder of Haneke Design in downtown Tampa, knows how to direct his employees to produce Web sites and print material for clients. Now, he is leading them to produce Web sites compatible with cell phones and other mobile devices.

It's not a total departure for Haneke (pronounced Han-i-kee). But it is a growing application for his five-year-old firm and one he will discuss as a featured speaker at the Sarasota International Design Summit Oct. 27-29.

"We've always been focused on design, on the user experience, from traditional Web sites to client interface," Haneke says.

More Haneke clients are talking about the mobile Web, browsing Web sites using their cell phones. Companies want to have the ability to have corporate communication compatible with those devices. One of those Haneke clients is discount store chain Target.

Target launched a sweepstakes centered on the "Speed Racer" movie. The program ran both in digital and traditional media outlets, including Target's in-store "Channel Red" television spots, 2M printed lanyards distributed at race competitions, and a digital marketing campaign. The campaign included a sweepstakes to win a trip to Japan to attend the 2009 Indy Japan 300 Race. To enter, customers use their mobile phones to send text messages to Target, containing a special keyword. Target hired Haneke Design to design and build a Web site specifically for mobile devices. After the contestants text the keyword to Target, they are given a special Web link to access the site on their handheld device.

Design requirements for the project included accessible content, simple yet effective and aesthetic design, minimal file sizes and the ability to be compatible with top-selling mobile devices.

"Companies are looking at tying things in with mobile campaigns,"

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Haneke says. "That can present some very intense design challenges."

Old school beginnings

After graduating from the Ringling School of Design in Sarasota, Haneke worked at a package design firm in New Jersey. He also worked for Image Technologies in St. Petersburg, doing CD Rom development and getting a taste of interactive media. Haneke also worked for a traditional design agency in Tampa doing advertising and marketing work.

"I come at this work from that traditional approach," he says. "My experience is from the creative side. I have a higher appreciation for bridging the gap between the silos of marketing and development."

In 2003, Haneke started Haneke Design as a one-man operation from his home. He eventually hired seven other people and operates from an old brick building on the north end of downtown Tampa. Despite netting some name-brand clients, like Target, many have not heard of Haneke Design.

"We've been kind of flying under the radar," he admits.

The firm's main selling point with its more than 50 clients is bottom-line results.

Good Web sites, signs, brochures, direct mail, advertisements and other visual material help businesses better educate their customers, prospects, internal staff or other audiences. When the businesses shorten the time it takes to educate their audience, it increases efficiencies and decreases costs.

Research is key

What is the main key to producing profit-making designs for clients? It isn't technology or eye-popping graphics. It's research.

"We spend a fair amount of time doing strategy and doing due diligence on the company," Haneke says. "You need to understand the target."

To aid its research, Haneke drafts questionnaires for clients on different product types. It then sits down with clients and spends two to three hours going over the questionnaires.

"We ask 'What are the pain points?'" Haneke says. "A lot of our clients aren't used to that. We take a step back. We can't be effective until we understand this information."

Because of its small size, everyone at the firm is a designer and works with clients directly. That means there is no translating needed from clients to account executives to designs as other design firms do.

"We empower designers so they can do their jobs in the most effective way," Haneke says.

Haneke started designing for clients, but these days he mainly supplies creative direction and manages the business.

At a crossroads

Revenues have doubled through the first three years of the business and have continued to grow. Haneke sees the firm at a crossroads, either staying at eight to 10 people, or possibly growing to 20.

"We're now preparing for that next stage of growth," he says. "From what I've seen in this business, the stage now is the critical one. It's all about the corporate infrastructure. We've been trying to make sure we grow intelligently."

Web site work makes up about 80% of the firm's business. It also does



design work for clients in corporate identity, branding and print media. It may offer help for a client in rebranding, designing a new name and logo. It will design the whole corporate graphics package, and write out the specific standards so the client can follow them consistently.

Haneke also does traditional print work, such as brochures, direct mail and trade show displays and support.

The biggest lesson Haneke has learned so far is how difficult it can be to find the right people for your company. However, he hasn't had to search beyond the Gulf Coast.

"In this business, it is talent oriented," he says. "You need good people to fill the right gaps. People are here that I've worked with in years prior. We're fortunate to have found the right people. We find them locally. We're grown pretty organically."

The biggest differentiator for Hanke is the up-front and thorough research process with clients, Haneke says.

"I don't see a lot of our competitors doing that," Haneke says. "Without that, it hurts the process in the end."

Haneke designers don't reveal a finished draft weeks later. Instead, they create a preliminary design so clients can see if the work is moving in the right direction.

"We try to create the skeleton of everything first," Haneke says. "That's so that our clients can look at a wire-frame prototype. It speaks to our process. Customers can comment on that."

The other niche for Haneke is its knowledge of Web site development.

"If we walk into a software market company, we understand the development side of things and can bridge that gap," he says. "Then, there is brand consistency. We get both sides of the house talking the same way."

Haneke's competitors are varied and include advertising agencies and design firms. It markets itself by word of mouth and referrals and so, not surprisingly, half of its clients are in Florida. It doesn't respond to requests for proposals.

"With some remote clients, we don't always have to be there," Haneke says. "With crucial project information, the online system is better than random emails flying. This helps us share documents and provide feedback."

REVIEW SUMMARY

Company: Haneke Design

Industry: Commercial design company

Key: Help customers make more money through effective design.

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