

5 minutes...

...with Neil Livingstone, CEO of retail advertising specialist .99.

Louise Lawton \\ .99 has been up and running for six-and-a-half years now. How have you managed to create such a successful and award-winning agency from the ground up?

Neil Livingstone \\ .99 opened for business in August 2003. It was borne out of my frustration of never being able to "nail" a major piece of retail business over my many

find anyone better than Craig; he is truly a unique creative individual.

LL \\ How has .99 achieved its growth?

NL \\ Today we have 110 staff and 26 clients, including Farmers, Vodafone, New World, Westpac, Air New Zealand and Mazda. We are an agency with a true focus on retail communication effectiveness.

have built an impressive suite of inhouse services: digital, photography, retouching and pre-press, motion graphics, animation and audio.

Having these services based within the agency enables us to deliver high quality work, quickly and cost effectively. We also quickly know what's working and if it isn't we change it.

latter. This has to some extent been brought about by media channel fragmentation. Quite frankly, the rules of creative engagement are changing rapidly. The Air New Zealand 'Nothing To Hide' campaign is a great example. This campaign captured the imagination of people around the world. We had 10,228,632 unique YouTube views across the Nothing To



years in advertising. It became blatantly obvious to me that unless you specialise and, most importantly, create a unique retail culture, you would never succeed in setting up a successful retail advertising agency.

The differentiation in our business has always been, and will always will be, the work, and the most important appointment in any agency is the executive creative director. Finding one who is dedicated to retail is not easy. In comes Craig Whitehead, a truly dedicated retail ECD and from day one we have built the agency around a true dedication to creative retail work. You would not

Retail is all about daily results, which incidentally we monitor, thus we very quickly know how effective our work has been - we certainly aren't in the "traditional" zone of "50% is working, though I am not sure which 50%".

We love retail work and hire people who share our love of retail. That's how we have achieved such rapid growth, to a point where we are one of the biggest agencies in New Zealand!

LL \\ Being dedicated to retail means short deadlines?

NL \\ Yes, you have to be quick on your feet. We don't have the luxury of "sitting" on a brief for any length of time. To facilitate our "speed to market" we

LL \\ How does .99 differentiate from the traditional agency?

NL \\ We are very different, driven by our single-minded focus on retail. Quick response, shorter campaign life-cycles, a concentration on effectiveness, use of different channels, in-house resources - a totally different mind-set and culture! Most importantly - a total dedication to retail - something unique to New Zealand agencies.

LL \\ Any thoughts for the future?

NL \\ The budget splits between million dollar investments in pure brand campaigns/ to tactical and quick response work has changed - more money is being invested in the

Hide channel on YouTube.

Most importantly, the campaign exceeded all marketing objectives. The campaign also won Best In Show at the 2010 RSVP Awards.

We believe at .99 we are leading the charge, to a new communications environment.

One final point, the people who were there in August 2003 - myself, Craig Whitehead, Jarad O'Hara and Craig Pethybridge - are all still here!

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