

## ADVERTISING STARTUPS

# Big brands enticed by savvy

Marketers are spending record sums on investing in the best and brightest tech entrepreneurs,

If you happened to pop by a Guardian store in Singapore, chances are you spotted snazzy-looking touchscreens featuring Unilever brands. The interactive apps use gamified branding experiences in an experiment in how brands connect with consumers.

The campaigns were not developed by any of the agencies on the FMCG giant's roster, but by PlayTMN, a little-known Singaporean startup.

It's a signal that multinationals are no longer depend solely on traditional creative and media agencies to deliver winning marketing campaigns. They are enlisting new and nimble tech firms to make sense of the shifting digital landscape. But what impact is this having on the way agencies do business?

Big consumer brands such as P&G, Unilever and Mondelez are spearheading the new incubation model, which gives startups funding, support and sometimes access to in-house laboratory facilities.

Last October, foods giant Mondelez tapped nine tech startups for 'Mobile futures', an initiative aimed at driving impulse buying and improving in-store marketing.

The campaign rolled out in Australia earlier this year, in an initiative pairing five well-loved brands including Cadbury and Philadelphia, with five startups in the mobile space. The final cut included: Myshout, an app that allows users to remotely treat their friends to a round of food or drink; Proximiti, a location-based services platform that personalises business websites to customers' real-time location; and Issueapp.com, a magazine-generating app with "shoppable" stories.

Unilever announced early this year the creation of the Foundry, a platform that offers funding and support to startups in digital marketing, e-commerce and analytics.

"We're not just looking to play around and experiment for the sake of experimenting," says Rahul Welde, vice-president of Unilever. "This is about finding the big companies and partners of the future. Our ambition is that these startups will scale with us to become long-term strategic partners."

According to Welde, using the incubator model has three major benefits for brands. Firstly, it allows them to de-



**In touch...** gamified branding on playTMN's interactive in-store screens snares consumers

velop and iterate faster. Secondly, it brings a new, innovative mindset into the office. Thirdly, startups are less risk averse, so not afraid to disrupt with cost-effective solutions.

So far, the Foundry has identified a diverse range of companies in some specific niche sectors.

Unruly Media, are headquartered in London but have

been making waves in Asia where a team of video marketing experts are currently expanding in the region. In May, they made headlines with their 'Dove real beauty sketches' campaign that generated record-breaking views — 114 million in the first month alone. Their core business is taking video content and amplifying it across the web by

utilising a vast online video-sharing database that is six times larger than YouTube.

"Mad men versus maths men? We're on the maths side," says Phil Townend, Unruly managing director, Asia-Pacific. He sees the future of tech startups and agencies as collaborative, not competitive. "Unruly aren't trying to scramble over the top of the

## BIG IDEAS What tech start ups can teach agencies

Working with startups gives marketers a breath of fresh air. They get access to hundreds of ideas. Participants come from more diverse backgrounds than typical agency folks, so ideas are more disruptive.

Also, typical product or campaign development projects can take months, while our community can deliver results in just a few weeks. This speed and

agility is something that larger organisations with layers of bureaucracy and more traditional innovation processes cannot match. When time to market is critical this is an undeniable competitive advantage.

Most of our clients are marketers. They are operating in mega-organisations handling billion-dollar brands, where risk-taking is neither



encouraged nor rewarded. So they rely on proven, tested formulas delivered by a small number of carefully vetted partners such as creative agencies. Unsurprisingly, they have now run out of fresh ideas to break through the clutter.

While I've seen a definite trend towards investing in innovation through collaborating with start-ups, it is fair to say that most

tech start-ups still get stuck in the 10 per cent budget pocket, under the guise of piloting and learning.

The biggest challenge for any tech start-up in this industry is to cross the chasm and shift from being seen as "play money" to mainstream.

*Joel Cere is global director of insights and innovation solutions at eYeka.*

PICTURE CREDIT

# startups

writes *Charlotte Middlehurst*



already in the mood to buy

media agencies and creative agencies to get to the client.”

Another example is playTMN, the Singaporean company behind the in-store gaming solutions in Guardian.

“We create consumer engagement at a time when the consumer is ready to be spoken to, when shopping,” says Julian Corbett, co-founder and chief executive. “This is

where 93 per cent or US\$15 trillion of annual retail transactions take place.”

Then there is “experience agency”, Imagination. With 19 offices globally it is one of largest independents out there, and already counts Shell, Ford, Jaguar and Telstra among its clients. Unusual for an agency, Imagination has been developing tech software in-house for a year.

“Traditional creative agencies are in flux,” says Andrew Au, MD of Southeast Asia. “There is a lot of activity and growth, particularly in Asia-Pacific, so if you don’t already have the capabilities internally, there is a real push to on-board them.”

Rahul Vasudev, MediaCom’s head of digital, Asia-Pacific, says the developments are pushing agencies to work with startups. “It’s imperative for us to work with start-ups and be open to new ways of working; we collaborate together across the entire digital spectrum,” he says. “The biggest challenge we face working with startups is their inability to scale quickly across markets. As soon as we find a startup which we consider impactful, our intention is to

scale it across clients and markets, but many of these companies are limited by monetary and regulatory issues.”

So what is the blueprint for the future? The jury is split. The newest marketers, such as Unruly, say traditional agencies that ignore the need for third-party tools may have difficulty winning bids. But from the client’s perspective, the traditional model is far from obsolete.

“There’s still a big role for our traditional agencies,” says Unilever’s Welde. “The technology startup companies bring new technology, but they still need a strong creative expression and application to land these new engagement tools in a way that consumers will embrace.”

**Our View:** Startups are challenging the traditional and dominant marketing companies. However, we predict a collaborative approach rather than a competitive one as agencies and new marketing tech companies start working together. **Have something to add? Please email [emily.tan@haymarket.asia](mailto:emily.tan@haymarket.asia)**

## CASE STUDY Gamified branding makes an impact

Since January, Unilever has been running campaigns on Singapore-based adtech startup, PlayTMN’s ‘InStore Touch Screen Network’ for its brands, which includes as Dove, Toni&Guy, Sunsilk, Vaseline and Lifebuoy.

So far, the campaigns have gained over 1 million engagements and generated over 16,000 hours of active consumer time, on 200 screens at

health and beauty stores in Singapore. At the time of writing, the campaigns running in Fairprice grocery stores were active in six locations and had chalked up as much as 2,000 engagements at a single store in a day.

“We provide a unique media space,” says Julian Corbett, co-founder and chief executive of playTMN. “What is brilliant about

gamified branding is that it engages the brain in a completely different manner to that of just seeing an ad.”

Their newest campaign for Unilever involves the ‘Dove Nourishing Oil Care Nutri-Oil Serum’. According to Corbett, “this one allows the consumer to play the ‘Frizz-Free 360’ game on playTMN and virtually experience how the product works in real-life.”

Craig Davis on Ideas...

## Diversity will make your ideas better

This isn’t a gender rant, or a race rant, or a rant on sexual and cultural orientations, or one in favour of eclectic professional proclivities. It’s all those things at once.

To borrow from Skittles, it really is time to taste the rainbow. Not because it’s fashionable, politically correct or fair (although, of course, it *is* fair), but because there’s not a company on earth that wouldn’t do a whole lot better with more diversity in its ranks. Fact.

I believe this is especially true in creative industries like advertising, design, media, marketing and technology, where the gene and hormone pools have become far too shallow (that part is not a fact, just a bullet-proof assertion).

So why do we continue to hire people in our own image and cast teams using 50-year-old clichés? Why? Because we’re all human and riddled with insecurities, prejudices and unconscious biases, that’s why.

Take the classical music scene for example. For many years women were few and far between in orchestras. In 1970, the top five US orchestras had fewer than 5 per cent women. By 1997 they were up to 25 per cent and today some of them are well over 30 per cent. Why the change? Orchestras started using blind auditions.

The case for diversity goes far beyond gender, however. Digital problem-solving hub Innocentive posts gnarly scientific and technical problems for people to solve for pots of cash. Innocentive has found that most of the problems are better solved by teams of people outside the central discipline.

The case for diversity is really a case for better quality teams and ideas. Companies that fully embrace diversity and inclusion will progress and perform at an entirely different level to those that consider it just a “nice thing to do”.

*Craig Davis is founder of Brandkarma and formerly CCO of Publicis Mojo, Saatchi & Saatchi Asia and JWT Worldwide. He is on the board of Conscious Capitalism and blogs at [craigdavisnow.com](http://craigdavisnow.com)*

