

AT TEN

As MindShare reaches its tenth birthday, the network is going back to its rebellious roots with a radical restructure. But will its plan to be the 'global glue' of its clients' marketing activity prove to be successful in the long run? Anne Cassidy reports

COLINSTOUT
media companies are best placed to lead companies. It's about data and content and also about intellectual property, digital and media addressability," Emery says.

It's also a breakaway from the traditional approach to media as an afterthought. Rimini says: "Clients want more analytical channel thinking near the front. In the old days, they would do the media thinking after the idea."

One of MindShare's clients, the European marketing director of Ford, Mark Simpson, says the car giant is happy to entrust MindShare with its business planning: "We can use MindShare as the centre of planning. The reason for this is that we are absolutely insistent that we have channel-neutral planning. It's only really MindShare that can be truly objective on this."

Ford is one of many clients that have collaborated with MindShare in the area of content creation (there is product placement for Ford in the latest Bond film, and Ford funded the Channel 4 website series *Bite*).

In the US, such forays into content creation include *October Road*, a drama series created by Group M and Touchstone Television, for which Group M used its own finances and then marketed opportunities within the show to advertisers.

MindShare made *In The Motherhood*, an online comedy series, with Sprint and Unilever, and, again with Unilever, the first global advertiser-funded programme, *Rexona Fans United*. Other MindShare projects include the financing and production of the series *The Days* for ABC.

Bumping up revenue from content creation is a prime objective for the new model. Proctor states: "Currently, about 80 per cent of our business is traditional media planning and buying. Twenty per cent is business planning, econometrics, sponsorship and content. These have been specialist outrider areas, which we are now embedding. I'm sure media planning and buying will be the bulk of what we do, but the revenue streams from new areas will increase – either that or we will have failed."

It's a shift away from the old operation, but remains true to its pioneering origins. From its very inception, MindShare was unconventional. Even its name (sneered at by some as "tree hugging" and "sounding like a religious cult") was out of step with the fashion for militaristic, masculine monikers (think Zenith). It positioned itself away from traditional media agencies on the intellectual high ground and was billed as the world's

first truly global media brand. Here was a new type of media network, more akin to a consultancy than a traditional media buying shop.

Its philosophy was to be the House of Media to each local market's requirements. Proctor devised the blueprint for the agency, bringing together research tools from the WPP group to draw on the planning and buying heritage gained from the merger of WPP's JWT and Ogilvy media operations.

At the time, it was hailed as potentially the most exciting thing to happen to media planning and buying since the discipline began evolving into a separate business sector. It only started to live up to its hype several years later when it landed some impressive clients, including Kimberly-Clark, HSBC, Samsung, Nestlé, Unilever and IBM. Meanwhile, other agencies, like PHD, were beginning to catch up on its planning-led model.

"Ten years ago, we were regarded as the new rebellious movement. We were the shiny new punky agency, but it's the same with anyone: if you're around for long enough, you start to be seen as the establishment," Emery says.

Last year, MindShare lost its Mattel and Samsung global accounts, along with Fox in the US. The House of Media was starting to look a little shaky, but behind its doors a major strategy shift was already underway.

MindShare made a number of high-profile hirings with a non-media bias, such as Simon Andrews, a former partner at Delaney Lund Knox Warren & Partners, as its first global chief strategy officer; Andy Farr from WPP's Millward Brown for a new role as the head of research; and Rimini, who was formerly the director of strategy for JWT.

It also hired the former Channel 4 producer Simon Willis to build its entertainment portfolio, and poached Norm Johnston, the former Digitas president, to be the joint president of the agency's former digital division, MindShare Interaction, in Europe.

The building blocks of a major reorganisation of the business were being put into place and, according to its architects, the new full-service model is just a codification of how MindShare has been operating for the past few years for its more progressive clients.

Emery explains: "There was a conscious decision to bring people who were of a broader skills-base so we could make this idea of a full-services agency a reality. We started working differently with clients. They started asking us to develop and lead their planning processes, working with



'We were the shiny new punky agency, but if you're around for long enough, you start to be seen as the establishment'
Nick Emery, chief of strategy, MindShare



'We devised a whole system, but the client doesn't have to use the whole thing: they can just use part of it'
Marco Rimini, head of comms planning, MindShare



'It's what they look like in two years' time that will be the measure of how successful it is'
David Pattison, chief executive, i-level

them on all their business needs rather than just their media needs. This took us to the big idea of developing content and contact work, rather than just media execution."

The House of Media has duly been toppled to make way for a new "revolutionary" philosophy called the Value Exchange, focusing on managing an exchange between the brand and the customer and in essence applying the basics of marketing to a digital age.

Philosophical direction aside, the restructure makes the network a whole lot easier to navigate, both for clients and staff. Its original structure was confusing, as the former head of MindShare Worldwide, Irwin Gotlieb, revealed when he took his post in 1999 and said: "MindShare is a far bigger organisation than I've ever run, and I will have to adapt my style a little bit. It's very difficult, even for me, to figure it out."

Proctor says the change brings with it a welcome accessibility: "There were too many divisions and silos, so we have broken down the walls to make it an easier company to buy services from."

The change will also involve a flattening of hierarchies and an eschewing of status-centric job titles for ones that are more reflective of what people do. OK, so it's not exactly anarchy in the UK, but still politically daring. The theory is, it's a move towards becoming less about the collective "I am" of the agency and more about the client.

The restructure should prompt others to follow suit, Emery says confidently: "I don't want to sound pompous, but I feel that MindShare now has the opportunity to influence other agencies. We have the attitude that it's our company and we can do what we like with it. It was an obvious thing to do, and I am surprised more people haven't done it."

The founder of rival network PHD, and currently the head of the digital media agency i-level, David Pattison, takes a cautious view: "I suppose with all of these things, it's what they look like in two years' time that will be the measure of how successful it is."

Time will tell if MindShare's "global glue" sticks with clients, but what's obvious is that MindShare is determined to fight the ageing process.

Rimini says: "It's a brave thing to do. We could happily just sit here and make reasonable money, but Dom and Nick are saying no to that. We want the spirit to continue, and to avoid becoming big, boring dinosaurs."