

# Johnston signals MindShare's digital ambitions

MindShare Interaction needs to raise its profile. Is Norm Johnston the right man for the job? Danielle Long reports

## HEADLINER

If every year in digital equals seven years in the offline world, then Norm Johnston, the new joint chief executive, EMEA of MindShare Interaction, is looking remarkable for his age.

At 41, the former president of Digitas London has 12 years' digital experience under his belt, making him a grandfather in digital marketing terms.

Johnston dived into the digital agency world in 1995 at Modem Media, and has been there ever since. So his decision to switch sides after so much time and join a digital media agency was bound to raise some eyebrows.

In his new role at MindShare, Johnston joins Rob Noss, the current chief executive of Interaction, to expand the agency's opportunities across Europe, the Middle East and Africa. While Noss will take a client-facing role, managing the agency's global clients, Johnston is tasked with driving MindShare's expansion from a digital media agency into a broader digital marketing services provider, offering search, eCRM and communications planning.

Steve Vranakis, the creative director and partner of VCCP, says: "His arrival means MindShare instantly has credibility in the space."

Johnston joined Modem Media's Connecticut office in 1995, when the agency had just launched the first online banner. He cut his teeth on the Atlanta Olympic Games' online activity before he was charged with setting up the agency's European office in London in 1997. Under Johnston and the tech specialist Glenn White, Modem Media Europe won accounts for Citibank, AT&T and Unilever, and began to grow.

Johnston's career trajectory with Modem Media was sharp. Beginning as an account director, he rose through the ranks to client services director and then managing director of marketing strategy services. In 2003 he became the vice-presi-

PHOTOGRAPH BY DANIELLE LONG



Johnston... 'MindShare Interaction has the weight and scale in the market to truly take digital to great heights'

really going to happen over the coming years."

Johnston's appointment shows MindShare is attempting to sharpen its digital ambitions. He brings a wealth of experience to the agency, which is still viewed by the market as a fairly young operation. The company has been through a number of incarnations, as mDigital and mOne, before settling into its current guise. The task now for Johnston will be to unify and drive the agency's expansion across the EMEA region.

One digital industry figure says: "His appointment shows MindShare's intentions around digital. Seniority, gravitas and kudos are hard to get in the current digital market, so when you find someone like that, you pretty much do all you can to grab them. MindShare is obviously seeing that revenues in Europe are starting to catch up with those in the UK and is moving in line with that."

However, the challenge for Johnston will be understanding the differences and nuances of the individual European markets, which he will need to work with on a local level in order to drive the agency's regional growth.

One source says: "Europe is varied in terms of the levels of development and a one-size-fits-all approach will not work. Norm will need to take a local-level approach to each market and work out what is possible in which market on a case-by-case basis."

According to Simon Andrews, the chief strategy officer, worldwide, at MindShare Interaction, Johnston is the man for the job.

Andrews says: "We need more people like Norm, who have grown up understanding digital and how it fits in the market as a whole. MindShare is ambitious in this space and has been successful in the market. Now, as we look to move out of digital media to do more digital marketing, we need to persuade everyone to think about the wider possibilities. We are asking people to embrace new skill sets, which is always a challenge, but Norm is the person to do this."

ten-year anniversary in March and it seemed like the natural time to move on to a new challenge. If anything, I stayed on through the changes to make sure the new entities were up on their feet. Digitas is a powerhouse agency and there is a great team in place."

Johnston adds that MindShare, like all media agencies, is restructuring to cope with the changing media landscape by offering more digital marketing services. It's about time; MindShare has failed to make much of an impression, trailing the performance of rivals such as ZenithOptimedia's Zed.

However, Johnston says: "MindShare has the weight and scale in the market to truly take digital to great heights. There is great innovation and great people. It is the right time to make the move, to be at the heart of where things are

## The lowdown

Age 41

Lives Queens Park

Family Wife Chantal, sons Thomas, Nicolas and Benjamin

Most treasured possession My Elvis bust

Interests outside work Shuttlung, kids around, hiking and biking, music

Favourite website drudgereport.com

Favourite ad H-P Pavilion

(mytwistedlove.com)

Last book you read

The Carpentered Hen and Other Tame

Creatures by John Updike

Favourite song

Ghost Town, The Specials

Motto Do the right thing