

ADWEEK

ADWEEK.COM

VOL. LI NO. 8 FEBRUARY 22, 2010

PUBLIC RELATIONS AGENCY OF THE YEAR

Edelman



Matthew Harrington (l.), president and CEO, Edelman U.S.;
and Richard Edelman, president and CEO, Edelman.

From game shows to taste tests, this shop is all about engagement BY T.L. STANLEY TELLESTANLEY@YAHOO.COM

Everyone knows eBay is the place where you can rummage through the contents of grandma's attic and bid what you think is fair for a milk glass vase. But in early 2009, not everyone knew that the online auction site was also a one-click shopping destination for new toys, fixed-price tools and bargain backpacks.

So eBay enlisted independent public relations powerhouse Edelman last March to help update its image and boost sales. The partnership has taken eBay to places it had not been before. The shopping bazaar—previously only accessible to consumers in cyberspace—came to life with a pop-up store that opened on West 57th Street in New York during the holiday season. Before that, Edelman rolled out the glitz when it created a promotion inspired by the classic television hit *Let's Make a Deal* that let shoppers win the prizes they correctly bid upon. The three-day event in June—dubbed *Let's Make a Daily Deal*—was set in Times Square. Hosted by Monty Hall (co-creator and emcee of the TV show) and actor/comedian Mario Cantone, the games took place live, online and on digital billboards.

"We wanted to shift perception and contemporize the understanding of what eBay is today," says Alan Marks, svp of corporate communications at the San Jose, Calif.-based company. "We're not just an auction site for stuff out of your house."

Edelman was tasked with creating an original, high-profile program that delivered results. It succeeded. eBay saw a 260 percent increase in first-time buyers and a 136 percent increase in first-time Daily Deal customers, the shop reports. Momentum also spiked from the pop-up store on 57th Street. The 5,500-square-foot venue sold electronics, designer clothes, cosmetics and housewares to hordes of price-conscious holiday shoppers.

"We were thrilled with how well Edelman captured the fun and energy of the brand," Marks says. "We put a lot of challenges in front of them and they ramped up in a matter of a few months. Their execution was spot-on."

Landing a marquee client like eBay and guiding the marketer into uncharted territory illustrated Edelman's M.O. for the year. The New York-based shop was determined to broaden the definition of public

relations and become invaluable in helping clients speak directly to consumers. It did just that.

“We’re promoting the concept of public engagement,” says Richard Edelman, the president and CEO. “It’s as much about what clients do as how they say it. It’s about being in people’s lives, taking on relevant, of-the-moment issues.”

Even a few years ago, that kind of thinking would have been beyond the mandate of traditional PR, which focused largely on landing media coverage, says Edelman, whose entrepreneurial spirit and hands-off management style are applauded by his staffers. While he holds people accountable for success, he encourages risk.



His technique is clearly working as Edelman and his team, Adweek’s Public Relations Agency of the Year, have become key partners in every stage of marketing. In 2009, the shop married computer giant HP with award-winning designer Vivienne Tam for a first-of-its-kind “digital clutch” notebook that landed HP in the glamorous worlds of Fashion Week and *Vogue*. The agency also created FilterForGood.com, a multi-layered online program for Brita where more than 1 million consumers pledged to reduce their plastic water bottle usage by buying Brita filters and reusable Nalgene bottles. The vibrant social media-based program, along with alliances with the Sundance Film Festival, NBC’s hit reality series, *The Biggest Loser*, the 2009 Grammy Awards, and U2 and the Dave Matthews Band tours, drove double-digit growth for Brita and saved more than 182 million bottles, according to the agency.

For Wonderbra’s Dita Von Teese collection, Edelman produced a raft of original content featuring images of the burlesque beauty, a short film called *The Science of Sexy* and interactive elements. Without a press release or formal launch, executives parceled the content out and watched it take off. The film became the most-viewed entertainment video on YouTube, the program had front-page coverage on PerezHilton.com and the product line sold out in two weeks. It’s work like that, says Christina Smedley, head of Edelman’s global consumer practice, that shows “there’s never been a better time to break the stereotypes about what a PR agency can bring to the mix.”

During a rough economic year, revenue was flat at \$295 million in the U.S. But Edelman won a slew of new clients, including PepsiCo, Quaker Oats, Diageo and Bausch & Lomb. They joined blue chip clients like General Electric, GlaxoSmithKline, Walmart, Pfizer, Microsoft and Unilever on the roster. The firm, which hadn’t

lost a top-50 client in years, saw Nissan depart in 2009. The company added hundreds of new staffers, bulking up its digital team and adding globally in hot spots like Europe, Asia and South America.

Edelman’s digital business doubled year over year—from \$10 million to \$20 million in revenue—as clients went from considering digital and social-media programs to jumping in feet first, says Rick Murray, head of Edelman’s digital arm.

Facebook fans proved passionate about Ben & Jerry’s when Edelman created a page where consumers could determine new ice cream flavors. The project went from zero to 1 million fans within months. Murray called that a good example of a marketer that’s “ready to engage on everyone’s timetable, turf and terms,” ensuring its success in the medium. “There will still be ad campaigns that start and end,” he says, “but brands need to make sure they’re never gone.”

The Vermont-based ice cream company was one of many clients that benefited from the agency’s prowess. A 14-year relationship with Starbucks was refreshed last fall with the launch of Via instant coffee and Edelman’s help in staging a two-week, cross-country road trip with comedienne Erin Foley and Starbucks’ resident Tweeter, Brad Nelson. A film crew trailed the 14-state, two-country romp, producing a series of quirky Webisodes about car travel, caffeine and Canada.

“The road trip was a great way to showcase the portability of the brand and it’s a good example of how Edelman’s always pushing the envelope with new ideas,” says Vivek Varma, svp of public affairs at the Seattle-based coffee company. “They helped us establish credibility in market, drove trial and put a halo on the brand.”

The Via launch, which also included taste tests in some 12,000 stores, “blew away our forecasts,” says Varma. On the Facebook page alone, there were more than 240,000 requests for samples. Edelman will work on the global rollout of Via this year.

‘Edelman’s always pushing the envelope.’ –VIVEK VARMA, STARBUCKS



“It was a wholly integrated campaign with viral, YouTube, online, sampling and advertising,” says Matthew Harrington, president, CEO of Edelman U.S. “We could showcase the product as innovative and talk about how the company is in building mode and moving forward. We told both a product and a corporate story.”

The next chapter in the agency’s story will involve Richard Sambrook, a 30-year veteran of the BBC who most recently was its director of global news. He was hired this month as the shop’s first chief content officer and is likely to further the creation of content for the shop’s clients. Stand by. ■