

Marketing firm hits growth spurt



Photo replaced by C-3 Group

THE C-3 GROUP

Contact: Brad Cullman, president
Address: 263 Regency Ridge Drive, Centerville 45459
Phone: (937) 985-4234
Web: c-3group.com
Business: Marketing and advertising firm

Campaigning: The C-3 Group is on track to hit \$2 million in billings this year. It is now launching a marketing campaign. (Left to Right) Carla Hale, social media/account manager; Brad Cullman, president; April Pollock, senior account manager; and Paul Garcher, graphic/web development manager.

■ BY JOE COGLIANO
 DBJ STAFF REPORTER

Look out Dayton-area business owners, Brad Cullman is vying for your attention.

And he's doing it in a not-so-subtle way.

Cullman's The C-3 Group, a Centerville-based marketing and ad firm, recently launched a risqué campaign that may raise some eyebrows.

It features the image of a man sneaking out of a bedroom while a woman sleeps, implying he intends to avoid a relationship after a night of passion. C-3 Group's mantra "we're not looking for a one night stand ..." cuts across the image in bright white letters.

"That's what we're really looking for, is an opportunity to meet somebody and see if there's a relationship there," Cullman said. "We're not for everybody, but I think there's a lot of companies that we could really help."

Armed with the new campaign and com-

ing off of a successful project for Dayton's The Submarine House, Cullman looks to more than double C-3 Group's sales and employee count by the end of this year. The four-employee firm did \$900,000 in capitalized billings — an industry benchmark — in 2010, and already matched that total by the end of May this year. He said C-3 Group is on track to hit \$2 million in capitalized billings in 2011, in which case the firm would hire an additional two to four employees.

The "one night stand" campaign will start with its own Internet page (notaonenightstand.com) and a direct mailing to several thousand local businesses. The company will invest thousands of dollars to get started.

It's part of an effort to grab attention in a market cluttered with images and messages.

This spring, C-3 Group ran its most successful campaign for a client, an eating challenge for Dayton's Submarine House restaurant chain.

Here's how it worked: Patrons could take the challenge — eating the Submarine House's iconic Super Duper Cheesesteak sandwich — at any of its locations. Those who ate the two-and-a-half-pound concoction in 16 minutes or less got their sandwich for free, a T-shirt and a spot in the semifinals. Qualifiers competed to be one of seven area store champions, who then advanced to an overall championship event.

It was inspired by the popular "Man Vs. Food" television show, coming out of discussions between C-3 group and restaurant officials.

For several weeks, C-3 Group used social media exclusively to promote the contest. Then, it added radio and TV ads.

"Putting all those things together, coming up with a compelling idea in a contest, was really what made that whole promotion work," Cullman said. "It was great publicity for the Submarine House; it was good for

both of our companies."

The contest was covered by most local media, produced a monthly sales record at five of its seven stores and drew 5,000 visitors to the restaurant's site to read about the contest.

Cullman said the Submarine House has been around for a long time, but the challenge got the restaurant back into the consciousness of a large number of people.

Industry changes

In the golden days — picture the popular TV show "Mad Men" — marketing and ad firms kept a large staff and did everything for their clients. These days, Cullman said, the trend is for many businesses to piecemeal their marketing efforts by hiring separate firms for tasks such as building Web sites, meeting public relations needs and crafting social media efforts.

The first model can fail under the weight of too much overhead while the latter makes it difficult for smaller companies to maintain a consistent look and message, Cullman said.

Enter C-3 Group, which looks to morph the two styles by offering a full-line of services, but without the large staff.

To accomplish that, it keeps core work in-house — such as public relations, social media, graphic design and Web design — while using a network of freelancers for technical work such as videography and Web programming. C-3 Group caters mostly to small and mid-sized companies.

"That way we're more affordable for a company that's not going to have a huge marketing budget," Cullman said.

In addition to the Submarine House, its clients include Moraine-based Allied Shipping and Packaging and Columbus-based The Vaughan Group Ltd., a property management firm.

Cullman spent 14 years as an exec with another area firm, now known as The Eastpoint Group, and served for several

See **MARKETING** page 9

MIKE MITCHELL: INNOVATION

Branding claims renewed worth in 21st century innovation

Creating a brand has long been the holy grail of marketing: It is what separates a valuable asset from a mere "product." The power of branding can

be seen as you drive down any main street, dotted with McDonald's instead of "hamburger stands," Wal-Mart's instead of "general stores," and signs selling Coke instead of "cola."

However, after becoming de rigor in the mass marketing world of the latter half of the 20th century, the concept of branding is in doubt in the 21st century.

In 21st century marketing, where the consumer has so much access to knowledge and variety of similar products, attempting to separate one product from the other based on image can seem like a futile and old-fashioned notion. But, the consumer of the 21st century also demands innovation and branding may find its footing again.

A brand provides a wealth of opportunity to innovate and help meet the insatiable appetite for new things among consumers of the 21st century. Having a meaningful brand may in fact be the new currency for innovation.

In a recent project where we were trying to determine if a new idea was going to sell, I witnessed the power of a brand to pave the way for innovation. We tested the new product under a new, never-been-seen brand name and it failed.

Consumers were loathe to believe all the true and wonderful advantages the new product offered. We retested the product concept under a known and respected brand name and it passed with flying colors. Consumer skepticism was erased and the product was lauded as being on the forefront of meeting needs, and in the process, being innovative. Likewise, the brand name itself received applause in the

See **MITCHELL** page 9



MARKETING: Clients also include Allied Shipping and Packaging, The Vaughan Group

FROM PAGE 8

years as general manager of a private golf club before starting C-3 Group in late 2008. A short time later, Cullman was hired by a Beavercreek firm to bring his clients aboard and expand that company's business. When that company shut down last spring, Cullman revived C-3 Group.

His biggest challenge in getting the firm this far was establishing enough business to grow from a one-man show to have enough workers to do those core tasks.

He had a few customers out of the gate, carry-overs from the original launch in 2008, but not enough to support four employees. So Cullman quickly hit the phones, tapping

into his network of contacts to find additional clients and boost revenue.

While C-3 Group is on the rise, Cullman admits he made a mistake early on by neglecting the firm's own marketing efforts in favor of working on client projects. As a result, its pipeline of work started to dry up.

Now the firm is back on solid ground with a revamped Web site and the new campaign.

"I think what it does is it shows that we have the ability to come up with really good, strong creative (material)," he said.

David Bowman, chief marketing strategist for Dayton-based Penny Ohlmann Neiman, said competition in the Dayton marketing

community is at an all time high, which is forcing companies to break out of their traditional roles.

That recently led Penny Ohlmann Neiman to put more emphasis on digital-based marketing such as social media strategy and pay-per-click campaigns.

"These new services have resulted in several new hires and exponential growth of our agency," Bowman said.

New message

The idea for the C-3's new campaign actually sat on a shelf for months.

While catchy, the shock value of the one night stand campaign isn't something C-3 Group typically applies to his clients' work. Cullman was even worried the one-night stand campaign might backfire, so he did a test run with a small group that included current clients.

And based on the mostly positive feedback, and after a lot of soul searching, he decided to move ahead.

"You've got to have the right message, delivered in the right medium, to get results," Cullman said. "It made sense for us."

■ E-mail jcogliano@bizjournals.com. Call (937) 528-4424.

MITCHELL: A brand has undeniable value

FROM PAGE 8

form of new respect and comments of "worth a second look" from a group of jaded, 21st century consumers.

Through the experience we learned that the old-fashioned notion of branding and the new quest for innovation need each other.

Perhaps branding is like investing in gold. It comes in and out of fashion, but at its core, there is undeniable value. There is in the concept of branding, as there is in gold, worth — no matter what period in history.

Therefore, investing in your organization's brand or brands is as critical to surviving and thriving as it has ever been. Your brand now provides the foundation for innovation.

Keeping the brand fresh, relevant and differentiated is as important as keeping it top-of-mind with consumers.

A brand is your passport to innovation, but it is only as good as it is up to date. Now is not the time to diminish the value of branding, but to refresh its purpose for all that it can do for innovation. A sparkling, relevant brand can bring credibility to new ideas and a trust and familiarity which breeds acceptance. Branding hasn't grown out of date. Branding has grown up and is finding its way in a new world which demands innovation.

Mike Mitchell is president of Mitchell Innovation and Research. Reach him at mike@mitchellinnovationandresearch.com or through his Web site at mitchellinnovation.com.



Choice. Affordability. Wellness. That's the real value of Anthem.

With Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield, you can offer your employees more than just health coverage. You can offer them a health benefits package that provides real value...for you and for them.

- A range of affordable health, dental, vision, life and disability plans.
- Wellness care resources and tools your employees can use to live healthier.
- Potential cost savings through the strength of our network.

Real value for your employees and the benefits they need. Value for your company by helping to manage costs and create healthier employees. Find out more about Anthem's complete solutions for your company today at anthem.com/connects2.

Anthem. 
Health. Join In.™

HEALTH | DENTAL | VISION | LIFE | DISABILITY

Life and Disability products underwritten by Anthem Life Insurance Company. Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield is the trade name of: In Colorado and Nevada: Rocky Mountain Hospital and Medical Service, Inc. In Connecticut: Anthem Health Plans, Inc. In Indiana: Anthem Insurance Companies, Inc. In Kentucky: Anthem Health Plans of Kentucky, Inc. In Maine: Anthem Health Plans of Maine, Inc. In Missouri (excluding 30 counties in the Kansas City area): RightCHOICE® Managed Care, Inc. (RIT), Healthy Alliance® Life Insurance Company (HALIC), and HMO Missouri, Inc. RIT and certain affiliates administer non-HMO benefits underwritten by HALIC and HMO benefits underwritten by HMO Missouri, Inc. RIT and certain affiliates only provide administrative services for self-funded plans and do not underwrite benefits. In New Hampshire: Anthem Health Plans of New Hampshire, Inc. In Ohio: Community Insurance Company. In Virginia: Anthem Health Plans of Virginia, Inc. trades as Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield in Virginia, and its service area is all of Virginia except for the City of Fairfax, the Town of Vienna, and the area east of State Route 123. In Wisconsin: Blue Cross Blue Shield of Wisconsin ("BCBSWI"), which underwrites or administers the PPO and indemnity policies; CompCare Health Services Insurance Corporation ("CompCare"), which underwrites or administers the HMO policies; and CompCare and BCBSWI collectively, which underwrite or administer the POS policies. Independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. © ANTHEM is a registered trademark of Anthem Insurance Companies, Inc. The Blue Cross and Blue Shield names and symbols are registered marks of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. OH_DaytonBiz_062411

DBJONLINE

Download our mobile app!

Direct your device's web browser to: <http://www.bizjournals.com/dayton/apps>; search Dayton Business Journal in your app store or scan the QR code with your mobile device.



Available for iPhone, Blackberry or Android devices.