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10 marketing firms launch partnership in Philadelphia

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In what could be a first for the marketing and communications industry in Philadelphia, a number of locally-based firms have deliberately formed a partnership to work under one umbrella.

It's not uncommon for multiple marketing communications firms to work together on a project for a client, but 10 local, independently-owned firms in marketing communications—or marcom—have formed a strategic partnership called MarCom Alliance.

MarCom is being billed as the “third option” for marketing directors. The two typical options are working with a large, full-service agency that provides every service under one roof, or working with multiple independent, unaffiliated vendors, each with its own specialization.

Kim Landry, of Hollister Creative in Bryn Mawr, and Bill Haley, of Allied Pixel in Media, are the managing partners of the MarCom Alliance, which is made up of agencies based in the Greater Philadelphia region that primarily serve the Delaware Valley.

Each firm focuses on one or more specialties, including advertising, branding, blogging, collateral, content, design, public relations, research, SEO, SEM, social media, webcasting, websites and more.

There are 47 full-time employees in the MarCom Alliance.

“The pains I’ve observed in both situations are that people who go with a large agency, if they’re not one of the bigger clients, they feel they got stuck with a junior associate,” Landry said.

“The pain with juggling multiple vendors is getting them all to play nice together,” Landry said. “The collaboration part can work really great and can be a huge advantage, but if it’s not working well, it can be a big pain for the person trying to manage it.”

Clients are not obligated to work with all of the partners; it’s on an as-needed basis, and there’s no exclusivity or non-compete clause. That is, a client can work with non-Alliance firms along with Alliance partners.



BRIAN JACKSON/THINKSTOCK

“We’re here to be helpful. The real benefit is that we have a group of really talented individual companies that work together,” Haley said. “If a client has an existing relationship, we would certainly work with that.”

MarCom Alliance could be the first of its kind in Philadelphia, according to Landry.

“I don’t know of anything else that is exactly like this, certainly not in the marketing communications realm,” Landry said. “That’s what made it exciting for us – breaking new ground here and doing something that hasn’t been done.”

Janée N. Burkhalter, associate professor of marketing at St. Joseph’s University, echoes Landry in her assessment.

“It’s definitely common for different agencies to come together, but it’s interesting to do it all under one umbrella,” Burkhalter said.

For example, the commercial “Yes, Virginia,” which is part of retailer Macy’s Christmas campaign, was a result of multiple agencies working together for one project.

One agency may be able to write copy, but another must film it. And just because that agency will film it doesn’t mean they will edit it or place the project in the appropriate avenue.

“We’re saving the marketing director a whole lot of time that she might spend sourcing and managing various different companies,” Landry said. “At MarCom Alliance, the marketing director only has to work with one team leader to get everything done.”

Working with the alliance would benefit companies or marketing directors less experienced working with marketing communication agencies, eliminating the risk

and concern that may come with it.

“If you’ve been doing everything on your own, or you’re just starting out, you don’t really know how to do it,” Burkhalter said. “Going [to MarCom Alliance] means they can manage it for you instead of you having to go find [agencies.] It’s daunting if you don’t have any experience.”

The strategic partnership is a “good idea,” and can be beneficial if it’s done right, Burkhalter said.

The partnership officially launched at the end of October.

“My agency did a pilot with two partner firms earlier this year to test the concept,” Landry said. “We were completely transparent with the prospect about our partner arrangement, and we won the job, beating out five other well-established agencies. That convinced me the idea was going to work.”

In terms of payment structure, MarCom Alliance “is trying to make it as seamless as possible for the client,” Haley said.

“There is zero markup, and that’s critical because it’s somewhat unusual,” he said. “A client will not pay a cent more with MarCom than if they were to work individually with vendors. It’s a real efficiency piece.”

The alliance specializes in fields that are “healthy and growing” in the Philadelphia area, including health care, education, manufacturing, service businesses and more.

▶ The MarCom Alliance Partners

- ▶ Allied Pixel of Media
- ▶ Hollister Creative of Bryn Mawr
- ▶ Debra Malinics Advertising of Philadelphia
- ▶ Embarq Creative of Collegeville
- ▶ MTM Linguasoft of Philadelphia
- ▶ Pau Hana Productions of Conshohocken
- ▶ Perfection Events of King of Prussia
- ▶ Powers Brand Communications of Berwyn
- ▶ Search Actions of West Chester
- ▶ The Marketing Difference of Mount Laurel, New Jersey