

# 'boards

Agency of the Year

## Swinging for the fences

Goodby, Silverstein & Partners continues to elevate its game

by: **Barry Walsh**

Dec 1, 2008

Goodby, Silverstein & Partners' Jamie Barrett is a self-proclaimed "sports geek". Hence, when asked to describe the performance of the San Fran hot shop during 2008, the creative director/partner can't help but resort to sports speak. The agency is "riding the wave", trying to "swing for the fences on every account" and aiming to "get to the plate" with its most recent business wins. But even though the commentary is all filtered through Barrett's love of - make that obsession with - sport, you gotta give him his due... because every word is true.



GS&P did ride the wave this year, a wave of innovation and inspiration that the agency has skillfully negotiated for the past few years. They got to the plate and, let's say it, knocked it out of the park with a wealth of work for long-time clients such as Comcast (the hyper "Rabbit" spot), the California Milk Processing Board (the wild, weird White Gold campaign) and Doritos, as well as campaigns for the NBA, Häagen-Dazs and the Commonwealth Bank of Australia. So it shouldn't come as much of a surprise that we at Boards deemed our pick for Agency of the Year in 2007 worthy of - to use one last sports term - a "twopeat."

### KEEP IT SIMPLE

"All I want us to do is remain relevant," exclaims ECD/co-founder Rich Silverstein when discussing the shop's run of strong work over the last several years. "There's nothing about the past that's important to an agency." An overstatement, but you can see the point - resting on laurels is not an option in a fractured mediascape where creative content moves at the speed of light. Shops need to sharpen their ideas to razor precision to cut through the clutter. Thus, it's no surprise that when asked to pick his highlights from the agency's work this year, Silverstein immediately mentions the work for the NBA playoffs. In spots helmed by Dayton/Faris, basketball icons such as Shaquille O'Neal, LeBron James and Steve Nash are teamed up via a split-screen effect, their voices synched as they recite a stirring 'duologue'. The spots, jarring yet strangely hypnotic, end with the tag: "There Can Only Be One."

"Something that's so simple can be brilliant," reasons Silverstein. "When you boil something down, it can make it extremely powerful and that's what the NBA work was." The idea also proved to be infinitely translatable to other media, resulting in a Saturday Night Live parody and a Time magazine cover treatment, splitting the faces of Barack Obama and Hilary Clinton down the middle and copping the tagline.

"We did feel that it had the makings of something iconic," muses Barrett. Partner/CD Steve Simpson concurs, saying it reflected "what people wanted to believe was true: the celebrated, glorified and wildly overpaid athletes still deeply, passionately cared about playing and winning the game."

### HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY

"This past year we figured out it wasn't enough to be an ad agency anymore - we'd have to find other things to be," says co-founder/ECD Jeff Goodby. "One of the common threads across the work was to try things that would help our clients enter popular culture in some way. We'd ask ourselves, 'Honestly, is this something you'd tell a friend about or pass on to someone?' It was a 'be honest with yourself' year."

Perhaps some of the most culturally relevant work to emerge from GS&P was the material created for the DNC and Barack Obama's presidential campaign. Web films such as the hilarious if somewhat frightening "Maverick" and "Sarah Palin" (directed by Craig Gillespie and Clay Weiner, respectively) married clever creative with pointed political commentary. All told, 20 films were created by GS&P staffers and disseminated online, and Silverstein's graphic collaboration with The Huffington Post, in which Bush administration buzzwords were stacked in bold black-and-white, also raised eyebrows and consciousness.

Both Goodby, a former journalist, and Silverstein, a former AD at Rolling Stone, are longtime Democrats. While Barrett, head creative on "Maverick", says he was intrigued by Goodby and Silverstein's political savvy, it was the candidate that inspired him to "do anything I could in the little world of advertising to be part of the conversation."

## BUILD BUZZ

As for that "little world", in 2008, GS&P's reach extended both in terms of areas explored and geography. This year saw the agency hook HP up with MTV for The Engine Room, a show that, as Simpson puts it, "got into the bloodstream of creative culture" by displaying the HP laptop's versatility through celebrity-judged art and music competitions. For Häagen-Dazs, the agency spearheaded a Help the Honey Bees campaign, incorporating broadcast work, a sticky web home and a print ad dotted with flower seeds that could be planted.

The first fruits of the shop's work for the Commonwealth Bank of Australia also broke in '08, proving to be every bit as controversial in Oz as the awarding of the account to Goodby was last year. With "Down Under", GS&P pitted two stereotypes - the star-fucking, too-cool-for-school American ad agency and the koala and kangaroo-dotted Aussie outback - and slapped them together in a hilariously absurd spot. "Our job was to do something that was going to break through," reasons Goodby. The results? A 90% retention rate (a GS&P record), and the biggest increase in market share recorded by a bank in a single month.

## SHAKE THINGS UP

The mandate to make noise culturally also spread into the interactive realm. Riding high with past interactive highlights like last year's Get the Glass game for Got Milk?, GS&P's digital side, led by chief digital officer Mike Geiger, went into uncharted territory. Among the highlights: the scary-as-hell Hotel 626 site for Doritos, created to "raise from the dead" classic Doritos flavors with a game that was only live from 6pm to 6am on Halloween; and Sprint's "Now" widget, which encapsulates any moment in time with live, assorted web wonderment from around the world (see Monitor, pg. 8).

"The next big thing in interactive could be a website, a widget, a social media application, or a combination," says Geiger. "It's about what makes the most sense for telling the story. Really, how many iPhone apps do you use everyday? How many virals do you hang onto and watch again?"

Indeed, one such viral from this year wasn't a viral at all, but a banner ad created by GS&P with frequent collaborator and Flash wizard Mike Kellogg for Nintendo's Wario Land Shake It game. The agency convinced YouTube to let them post an ad on the site that masqueraded as a typical YouTube page - complete with the Flash viewing screen and comments underneath - that would literally fall apart from the shaking motion in the Wario clip.

## KEEP MOVING

Displaying a knack for simple, brand-centric ideas with these examples, the shop also won accolades for

its Hyundai work; specifically, the launch of the luxury Genesis model. It was the most successful US car launch in the company's history, and the carmaker had a better September in 2008 than in 2007. "We worked hard to elevate the brand perception," says CD Will McGinness. But despite the results, Hyundai announced this year it was moving its business, consolidating it under its Korean agency. "It's nothing we took personally - we're still doing work for them," says McGinness. "It's never nice to lose business but the circumstances were amicable."

And thankfully, there were also account gains, the most sizable being the Quaker Oats account. McGinness says the company aims to do 360 degree marketing "that will return the brand to the iconic status it deserves."

Thus, the shop, which after 2007's growth spurt now houses 524 employees, aims to move forward creatively and practically, even as an uncertain 2009 approaches. Goodby admits he expects January to be "horrible", while Silverstein predicts clients will opt for more hard-sell work. "I think you can still sell hard with entertainment," he offers. It will be a year in which, as more accounts go under review, creative competition will be fierce.

So on the subject of keeping on one's toes, let's give the last word to the sports geek. "You want to have good rivals," says Barrett. "In tennis, you could say that Federer wouldn't be as good if he didn't have Nadal. I think it's cool to be able to identify your competitors and want to be able to kick their asses as much as you can."

Goodby, Silverstein & Partners <http://www.gpsf.com>

---

Advertising



---

Advertising

Ads by Google

## Andy Batt Studio

Creative Photography Expert -  
Professional - Creative

[www.andybatt.com](http://www.andybatt.com)

---

© 1986-2009 Brunico Communications Ltd.

™ 'boards, Boards Online, First Boards Awards, and the tag line "The Creative Edge in Commercial Production" are trademarks of Brunico Communications Ltd. Use of this website is subject to Terms of Use. View our Privacy Policy.