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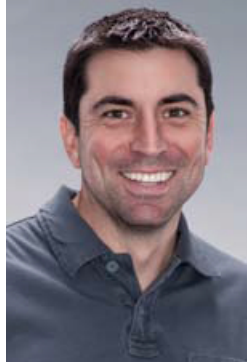


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POV: Interview with Tim McMullen, Founder and CEO of redpepper

By: [Jami Oetting](#) Date posted: July 23, 2013



Tell us about redpepper and what differentiates it from other agencies.

[Redpepper](#) is built on a core belief that a culture of growth and creativity is central to who we are and essential to our success. Redpepper is not a place where people are only expected to get their work done every day. Rather, it's a place where people do their best work every day and do it happily, without all that breathing-down-your-neck, blocked-websites stuff. There's no corporate ladder to climb. Instead, employees move into positions where they are most effective and passionate, which ultimately blends creativity with structure. But most of all, we center our culture on helping our people actively grow within their strengths and passions. Culture first, people second and customers third. It's the only lasting way to keep customers happy.

You founded the agency with your brother Dave. How has creating a "family" business changed your approach to building an agency?

Redpepper is not your typical "family business." As a matter of fact, we keep 289 miles between us to make sure we don't become your typical family business. With a total of three partners, two of us being brothers, we look at ourselves as business partners first, and the brotherhood is an added bonus.

Over the years, we began dividing roles to focus on our individual passions and strengths, meanwhile trusting that the other is performing and fulfilling these roles. We call it "trust and release." This allows us to focus on more things as an agency than perhaps a single owner might, all the while creating a great communications dynamic among the partners.

Many agencies have launched labs to encourage innovation, but redpepper sets aside every Friday as a Lab Day for all employees. Why do you think it is important for every employee to be involved in innovation, rather than just making innovation a part of the agency?

We believe agencies that focus solely on agency work are missing the mark. By breaking away from the traditional agency model and implementing rpLab Fridays, we are able to stay relevant in a constantly changing and evolving industry.

Exploring and trying new things helps us gain a deeper understanding of marketing challenges and bring practical applications back to our clients, which in turn makes us a better agency. It also creates a streak of independence and stability. By inventing our own applications and products, we become less dependent on billable hours.

We believe it is important for each employee to participate because each employee brings a creative approach and a unique perspective to the table. rpLab gives us the freedom to explore new ground and bring big ideas to life. It's all about growing, learning and exploring unique and valuable ideas — both for our clients and ourselves.

What has been some of your favorite projects produced by redpepper? Tell us about the thought and strategy behind these campaigns?

One of our favorite client projects is working with Kirkland's, a home decor retailer with more than 300 stores nationwide. When we started working with this retailer, it had virtually no social presence, a passive email database and certainly nothing tying it to business metrics. So we set out to create a full-on integrated marketing campaign.

We first created MyKirklands.com, a platform-independent destination where brand enthusiasts can connect and share their latest tips and creations. We managed this community site and all content while the client built a capable in-house team.



The next step of this integrated campaign was to grow the MyKirklands.com community. Our strategy was to create promotions that interacted with the interests and needs of Kirkland's customers in a way that matched the customer's natural media rhythms and increased engagement with MyKirklands.com members.

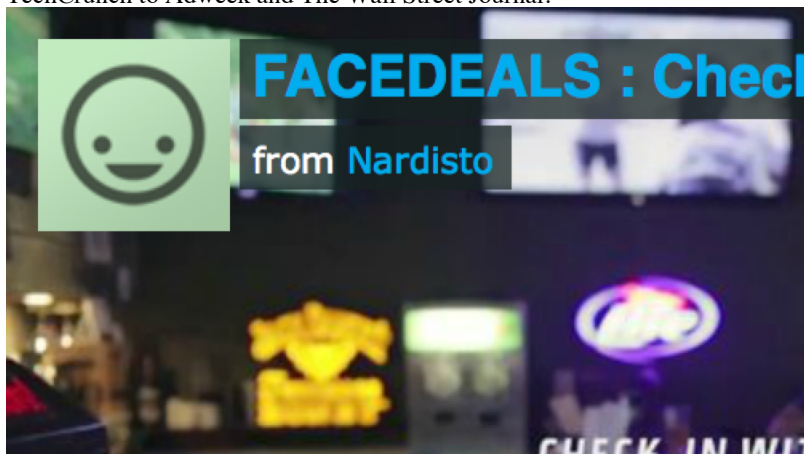
We also built [The Pinning Parlor](#), a microsite aimed at engaging current customers and reaching new people through Pinterest. In just one month, the number of Kirkland's pins on Pinterest was more than the number of pins that home industry brands West Elm, World Market and Hobby Lobby had received in the last three months.

In just three years, we've built a successful community site with fully ignited brand enthusiasts, developed a thriving Facebook (619,000 fans) and Twitter (22,503 followers) following and taken them to the top of Pinterest (24,038 followers). Kirkland's social database is now 4 million strong, and we've been able to measure a direct correlation between substantial revenue numbers and our social and digital strategies.

During an rPLab day, we set out to create a way for consumers and businesses to communicate more effectively with one another. Consumers want deals. Retailers want sales, and these days, they also want to learn as much as possible about their customers and build relationships with them. The challenge was that consumers often didn't perceive that they were receiving value from their interactions with brands. Our solution? [Face Deals](#), which brings marketing and technology together at new levels to provide the most intuitive and relevant messages to consumers yet. Simply put, it is a manifestation of the "like" button in the real world, and it's making some waves. (We were recently on [60 Minutes](#) and discussed the impact of this technology.)

The incentive for joining Face Deals was hinged on a reward system that would allow retailers and customers to mutually benefit from an interaction. To identify the customer, we discussed using RFID chips or mobile GPS tracking, but eventually we resorted back to cameras with facial recognition technology to connect the dots between brick-and-mortar locations and physical presence.

After opting in for the service, facial recognition cameras check in users at a location while simultaneously texting them a customized deal based on that person's Facebook preferences and history. This lab project went viral in a matter of days and was featured everywhere from CNN and TechCrunch to Adweek and The Wall Street Journal.



What has been the biggest barrier for clients to implement an integrated marketing campaign?

The overarching barrier we face is fear. Many clients don't want to implement integrated marketing campaigns the right way or all the way because they fear the unknown. People often want to take shortcuts. They want to create an integrated campaign using a linear creative process without establishing an overall strategy.

You must first develop a unified strategy, brand voice and messaging that is effectively communicated across all marketing channels by using an integrated creative process — a step that is often overlooked. A unified strategy guides not only the brand voice and overall creative concept, but also which marketing channels should be used and how the messaging should be tweaked for each channel's audience.

It takes a lot of discipline for everyone involved to invest the time, money and effort into developing a strategy and then referring to that strategy as a checkpoint for every aspect of the campaign to ensure consistent communication across all channels. Having a clear objective and focusing on accomplishing one goal is key to developing successful campaigns.

What trends in marketing/advertising do you find most interesting/exciting?

We often say that marketing is moving at the speed of technology. Marketing, technology and human behavior are all intertwined, and marketers must now be more inventive.

It is no longer just about creating relevant messaging. Rather, it's about using technology and customer experiences to intersect the message with

people’s lives instead of disrupting it. It’s like being [marketing scientists](#) and experimenting with new platforms, technologies and marketing channels to find new ways to share our clients’ stories.

We enjoy exploring new and unexpected ways to use an existing technology or product, and we absolutely love the opportunity to invent our own. We believe that the future of our industry goes beyond innovation to invention, and that gets us excited to come to work every day.

One reason you love what you do: The number one reason I love what I do is because it cannot be perfected; there is always an opportunity to explore, grow and get better at what I do. Another reason for my passion is because I love working with people who are constantly exercising their creative minds.

At redpepper, I get to watch people cultivate new ideas and garner attention for clients every day. It inspires me to see how everyone at redpepper not only enjoys learning new things, but also looks for opportunities to share that knowledge by teaching others. That’s the kind of culture that breeds happy people and happy clients.

Favorite ad: The Subservient Chicken for Burger King is a great example of using a non-traditional approach in the right channel to communicate a message in an unexpected way that gets shared over and over again by consumers. The messaging stayed true to their brand promise, and it was delivered in an entertaining way that got people talking about the brand even before the social media obsession.

Must-read book: “Hoopla” by Crispin Porter + Bogusky and Warren Berger.

Connect with Tim on Twitter [@timmcmullen](#) or on [LinkedIn](#).

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[Jami Oetting](#)

Jami Oetting is the Executive Editor of The Agency Post. She is an advertising nerd who's big on creativity, quick wit and good conversation. Interact with her on Twitter [@jamioetting](#) or connect on [LinkedIn](#) or [Google+](#).

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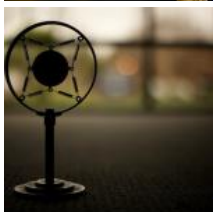
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