

WE Communications launches global network of independent, specialist agencies

 By Jessica Tennant

12 May 2017

Wednesday, 10 May 2017 marked the launch of The Plus Network, founded by WE Communications (WE).

The move saw the Seattle-based public relations firm partner with The Garrigan Lyman Group (GLG), Salt Branding, YouGov, Interel and Envy Create to offer integrated capabilities that span the media and policy ecosystem. The launch of The Plus Network was a natural progression for WE. "We've had an agency network for years," says president of international Alan VanderMolen. The firm, often associated with its largest client, Microsoft, added three partners, about five years ago, in lines of business and markets where the firm didn't have capability – "the back-end or the technology piece of digital, which is GLG, the branding, which is Salt, and the primary research, which is YouGov".

Given great dissatisfaction with holding company agencies and how they're homogenising their offering, WE recognised the opportunity to bring an alternative network to the table through The Plus Network with a full-service, integrated offering. In response, it rounded its existing partnerships by adding an experiential agency, Envy based in London and a global public affairs agency, Interel based in Brussels.

"I think there's a real missing link in the middle market of marketing services," says VanderMolen. "If you look at the largest PR companies, you've got them between 800 million and 1 billion. Then if you look at the holding companies, on the low side it's a billion and it goes up from there.

So, I think there's a real miss in between agencies that are roughly at 100 million up until 300 million, and I think that's a gap that we can fill for brands that are looking for smaller, agile, client-focused solutions versus getting lost in a holding company with a million other brands for clients."

As an alternative to these investor-focused holding companies, The Plus Network brings together global independent agencies to offer its clients and potential clients a specialist network that spans many lines of businesses. "We believe that having an independent spirit and having a network of global specialist agencies helps us differentiate our offer and be more client centric by making sure that we focus on the clients instead of focusing on our earnings."

The benefit of such a model is twofold. For the agency, there's demand for smaller agencies that are independent and that have a global network, and the client gets "joined-up" creative thinking without questioning where the revenue is going. Revenue is shared and the focus is on the client rather than on delivering returns for investors.

Having had already partnered with three of the agencies that now make up the network, and adding the policy and experiential agencies to complete the network's now full-service capabilities, the development phase was seamless. "There were absolutely no barriers," adds VanderMolen. "The market is ready for an independent, alternative to holding companies... we have a nimble, agile offer, which keeps our specialist networks alive and also brings an independent spirit," he concludes.



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For more information, visit theplusnetwork.co.

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