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News :: Jason Zada

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Jason Zada

Type: Director's Showcase

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Multi-screens, multi-faceted

March 23, 2009, Robert Goldrich --- A noted ad agency creative director moving into the director's chair is hardly a revelation. Agencies have been a spawning ground for assorted directors over the years. But Jason Zada brings a new dimension to the transition in that his creative chops are in the interactive arena.

Zada made his creative mark at San Francisco-based EVB, an interactive agency which he co-founded with CEO Daniel Stein in 2000.

(Omnicom bought a majority stake in the shop in '06.) For eight years, Zada served as EVB's executive creative director, creating ground-breaking online experiences for major advertisers such as adidas, 2K Sports, Levi's, JCPenney, Wrigley, Old Spice and Office Max. For the latter, Zada created and directed the "Elf Yourself" viral campaign, which generated hundreds of millions of online hits, gaining an unlikely place in pop culture.

It was during the last year of his successful EVB tenure that Zada started directing a good majority of the projects coming out of the agency. Beyond "Elf Yourself," those endeavors included advertising for adidas MLS (TV campaign/online episodes), JCPenney (online content) and 2K Sports (TV spot/online episodes).

The 2K Sports fare promoted the company's *All-Pro Football 2K8* video game. Centerpiece of the campaign was a series of six two-minute online episodes starring rapper Rakim and other hip hop artists reciting poetry that paid homage to legendary football players accompanied by footage from the video game in which the legends appear. A broadcast :30 featuring Rakim emerged from the online mix.

Zada himself emerged with a career decision some six months ago, exiting EVB to pursue directing full time. In January he landed at bicoastal Tool of North America, a production company with a pedigree in successfully bringing agency creatives turned directors into the marketplace.

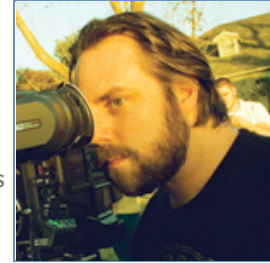
At the same time Zada brings a different perspective into that marketplace. "I didn't direct one story and force it to fit each screen for a campaign," related Zada. "You try to come up with the right story for each medium. You don't necessarily compress a broadcast spot for screening on a cell phone. You might, though, take the piece of that spot's story that makes sense for the phone user and adapt it.

"Multi-disciplinary directors," continued Zada, "are going to play more of an integral role in helping figure out the various pieces. Some of the best creatives I have worked with [at EVB, Zada found major agencies like Crispin, Goodby and BBDO tapping into his expertise] are open to collaboration. So let's see now what we—directors and agencies—can do working side by side. That's what I wanted as a creative director when working with a director. And it's what I hope to experience as a director collaborating with the creative community."

Meanwhile Tool envisions Zada as being active in traditional spotmaking as well as in thinking and creating well outside the :30 and :60 box.

At press time Zada was directing a Smokey Bear fire prevention TV PSA for Drafftcb, Irvine, Calif., his first job under the Tool banner. Independently he has wrapped three episodes of a branded entertainment digital series *We All Float On*, which centers on two best friends in their late 20s who refuse to grow up. Zada said one brand, which he wasn't yet at liberty to publicly identify, has already come on board, with the goal being to secure three more. The brand support is needed not only to fund the production but also a media plan to drive viewers to the show.

"This series is being done from an entertainment-first perspective," said Zada. "We're developing great entertainment and finding brands that fit and can properly integrate themselves



Jason Zada

into the show." He noted that Tool has helped in an advisory role.

"This isn't at all knocking the work I've done previously but Tool gives me an extra edge," observed Zada. "Being around extremely talented folks on the production side and seeing the high quality, world class production value coming out of Tool is inspiring. It will elevate my work.

"The other factor behind my decision to join Tool was I wanted to go to a place that is open to looking at where the industry is going and that wants to get more involved in the digital side of things. The directors here are so creative. I am learning from them and hopefully they can learn from me on some level, particularly in the digital space. It's one big learning pool."

Zada recalled that EVB opened as the dot-com biz was "going down the toilet. But we had this idea to do really interesting storytelling online with brands, kinds of storytelling that weren't being done at that time in the digital space. We got much more into this sort of filmed entertainment on the Internet—and that eventually led me back to filmmaking which I was fascinated with back when I was a kid. You find that true innovation and pioneering can blossom even during down times like when the dot-com business looked bad.

"Today I'm in love with where we are at in the industry. Obviously no one is in love with where we're at in terms of the economy. But there are still incredible opportunities.

"In some respects," said Zada, "it's a scary time. You don't know where the cards are going to fall. But it's such a fascinating time. Yes, money is moving into digital. But TV is never going to go away. It will just transform and we have the chance to be part of and to help shape that transformation."

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