

## ADVERTISING

# AMSTERDAM'S RED-HOT AD SHOPS

Its edgy, creative upstart agencies are pulling in big-name global clients

BY JACK EWING

**W**HEN SONY CORP. hired a new agency to handle its U.S. advertising this fall it went way beyond Madison Avenue.

Instead, Sony hired 180, an upstart shop in Amsterdam. The logical reaction to moving its American work to the city of Rembrandt, canals, and legal pot might have been: "What is Sony smoking?" But in choosing 180, Sony was recognizing something big marketers such as Adidas, Ikea, and Coca-Cola already knew: Amsterdam agencies are hot. Mike Fasulo, Sony Electronics' chief marketing officer, says 180 is "full of ideas and energy, and they're not afraid to take on big challenges."

Omnicom Group knows it, too. On Nov. 30, the New York-based marketing giant said it will buy a majority stake in 180, which won the Sony business in conjunction with Omnicom's BBDO. Tucked inside a series of row houses beside a canal, 180 is one of several small Amsterdam agencies that have won global accounts by helping clients cope with a fragmented consumer market and the rise of digital media. Amsterdam "is the best place to foster an international perspective," says Chris Mendola, a 40-year-old expat New Yorker who founded 180 with two partners in 1998.

Amsterdam shops such as StrawberryFrog, 180, and the local arm of Portland (Ore.)-based Wieden + Kennedy have made their names with unconventional campaigns. For Adidas, 180 launched a World Cup-related ad blitz when French soccer superstar Zinedine Zidane stripped off his jersey after a qualifying match to reveal an undershirt that read "+10,"

the logo of a campaign based on the idea that a player is only as good as his 10 teammates. The campaign included buzz-generating events such as a mock World Cup featuring pickup teams chosen off the streets by star soccer players.

## ALL THUMBS

AMSTERDAM AGENCIES are particularly clever at inventing quirky Net-based campaigns. StrawberryFrog, located in fashionably disheveled offices a few canals away from 180, is creating a spoof Web site to help British client Douwe Egberts launch Café Switch. The instant coffee comes in plastic pods that customers pump with their thumbs to make foam, and the site purports to let people auction ad space on their thumbs. To promote Asics' Onit-



suka Tiger shoes, the agency filmed over-enthusiastic Japanese teens singing goofy songs in English. The shoes sold out as the film spread on the Net.

Of course, every major city has ad agencies, and the Amsterdam shops are still relatively small. What sets Amsterdam apart is that these local upstarts are doing global work, often for A-list clients on the other side of the pond. The Amsterdam office of Wieden + Kennedy, for instance, has anchored key worldwide campaigns for Coca-Cola Co. and Electronic Arts Inc. And last summer, StrawberryFrog started working for Wal-Mart's Sam's Club stores.

Why Amsterdam? The city's openness and bicycle-to-work lifestyle help attract talent, as do a vibrant design scene and a cosmopolitan mix of people. "Amsterdam allows us to be in touch with the world without being swallowed up by any particular culture," says Brian Elliott, a founder of StrawberryFrog. One hallmark of Amsterdam TV ads is little or no dialogue, so nothing gets lost in translation. For instance, Wieden + Kennedy's "happiness factory" spot, running in scores of markets worldwide, conjures an animated fantasy world inside a Coke vending machine—with no words.

Omnicom's acquisition of 180 raises the question of whether small agencies, founded on a rejection of the status quo, can remain creative as they grow. Founder Mendola notes that 180 has a strong record of cooperation with big shops, including Omnicom's TBWA, which co-manages the Adidas account. But crosstown rival

Tim O'Kennedy, managing director of Wieden + Kennedy Amsterdam, questions whether global ad groups can tolerate the ups and downs that are part of being a small, cutting-edge agency. "Doing really, really good work," O'Kennedy says, "is more volatile and risky than doing work that's O.K." ■

## ATTENTION

The +10 campaign for Adidas got buzz during the World Cup

## Move Over **Mad Ave**

COMPANY	CLIENTS	NOTABLE CAMPAIGN
<b>180</b>	Adidas, Sony, Motorola, Opel	"Impossible is nothing" for Adidas
<b>STRAWBERRY FROG</b>	IKEA, Panasonic, Sam's Club, MTV	Casino Royale tie-ins for Heineken
<b>WIEDEN + KENNEDY</b>	Nike Europe, Coca-Cola, Electronic Arts	"The Coke Side of Life"

Data: Ad agencies