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Build Power Brands With Work-the-Street Appeal

Di-Ann Eisnor, CEO of Eisnor Interactive Advertising

Nicole Gibson pushes her way through the crowds of Manhattan's Midtown on her way to work. Her head is down, as it always is on Monday mornings when New Yorkers can be particularly gruff and abrasive. She's not shy. You don't become senior buyer at Macy's by being shy. She's just determined to get to her office and avoid any confrontations along the way.

It's when she's in front of the dry cleaners at 54th and Lexington that she sees it. It's in the curb, inches away from a drain opening. A brown leather tri-fold wallet. Good thing her head was down.

She stops abruptly. A man bumps into her from behind, obviously startled by her sudden stop. "Sorry," Nicole mumbles as she steps a bit to the side. She looks up, surveying the hundreds of people passing her by. She feels nervous. Mischievous. Like she's about to do something wrong.

But she knows she will pick it up. She knows she can't NOT pick it up. But can she be so brazen as to actually just scoop it up? No, of course not. She squats to the curb next to the parking meter, out of others' paths. She absently re-ties the laces on her left boot. And then she gingerly, but quickly, picks up the wallet and drops it into her coat pocket.

Once at the office, she closes her door and tells herself, "It's just curiosity. Of course I'll return the wallet to its rightful owner, assuming there's identifying information inside. Of course I won't keep any cash that's in it. Of course...." Before she's completed the moral discussion in her mind, her fingers – as if they have a mind of their own--are prying open the soft skins of leather. Onto her desk tumbles a \$10 bill and a small white card. She picks up the card, noticing that it has the same look and feel of Monopoly cards she played with as a child. She turns it over and reads, "Get out of hell free." The fine print points her to a Web site, CharityCounts.com, which serves as an information resource for national not-for-profits.

Nicole smiles. Not only is she \$10 richer, but she's amused by the clever tactic used to exploit her feelings of guilt at having picked up the wallet in the first place. "Charity Counts dot com," she mumbles to herself as she boots up her PC.

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Howard Kravitz has a lot riding on the game. Fifty bucks to be exact. If the Tennessee Titans can hold out for one more quarter, Howard will be able to take Maureen out to dinner at the new Italian restaurant around the corner. She'd like that, he thinks.

It's 2nd and 8, 3rd quarter, St. Louis has possession. 20 seconds left on the clock. _____ runs left and spirals the ball down to the 10-yard line, just beyond the outstretched fingers of _____. "Yes!!!" screams Howard, jubilant over St. Louis' incomplete pass. He rises from his Lazyboy as the commercials begin and saunters off toward the kitchen to tell Maureen about their upcoming dinner plans.

Meanwhile, on the television screen, a man sits behind a desk trying to make sense of his financial records. As the mountain of paperwork before him morphs into a monster, he turns on his computer and clicks to OnMoney.com. The site provides him the tools he needs to tame the

monster and organize his finances. In the glow of testosterone-induced bravado, the tag line reads “Get your money connected at OnMoney.com.”

The 30-second commercial might have appealed to Howard who, truth be told, does have difficulty managing his and Maureen’s finances.

The only problem is that Howard is in the bathroom when the \$2 million spot airs.

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What do Nicole and Howard have in common? For one thing, both are consumers. And, as such, each of them is deluged with marketing messages and advertising on an hourly basis (although Nicole misses much of it by keeping her head down, her eyes off the billboards). The other thing they have in common is that neither of them saw the OnMoney.com Super Bowl ad.

Their differences, though, outweigh their similarities. Yes, both are consumers, but they would rarely appear in the same demographic sampling. Nicole is young, single, urban and wealthy. Howard is middle-aged, married, rural and solidly middle class. Nicole rarely watches television, but reads *The Economist* and *Harper’s Bazaar*. Howard watches five hours of television per night and reads the local paper. From a target marketing perspective, what would be the best way to reach Nicole and Howard? Or would it make sense to even try to reach both of them?

A similar comparison is helpful in looking at CharitiesCount.com and OnMoney.com. What they have in common is a need to attract as many visitors as possible. They are both start-ups in the Internet world and are trying to establish themselves and drive traffic to their Web sites. Both must satisfy their stakeholders and, since they are both new to the Internet landscape, this is accomplished more through numbers of “hits” than generated revenue. Finally, in order to encourage consum-

ers to go to their sites, both CharityCounts.com and OnMoney.com have taken very risky approaches to launching their brand. This is where the similarities end.

Charity Counts.com invested a fraction of what a Super Bowl commercial would have cost to create an interactive, meaningful experience for the potential consumer. I, too, am a consumer. Like Nicole and Howard, I see the dot-com advertisements on television and plastered on subway cars. I click my way through the banner ads that populate my favorite Web sites. I hear the radio spots. I skim over the graphically charged, brightly colored ads in *Internet World*, *the Industry Standard*, and *Red Herring*.

Unfortunately for marketers, I don't remember any of it. Well, that's not really true. I do remember one of the first ads I saw on television for a dot-com. It was for an Internet job search company by the name of Monster.com. In the ad, children stare blankly at the camera, sharing their aspirations with the viewing audience: "*When I grow up I want to file all day. When I grow up I want to be a 'yes man'. When I grow up I want to fight my way to middle management.*" I think that ad was effective for a variety of reasons. It's simple black and white photography and easy pace don't bombard the senses as so many other ads do. Its message is powerful. We're able to see ourselves in the faces of these children. Did we have these same dreams as a child? Of course not. Yet, look what's happened to us! But I think the advertisement was most successful in capturing my attention (and holding it for two years) simply because it was *first*. And while that may not be completely accurate, it is the first dot-com advertisement I recall seeing during the "Must See TV" line-up.

I remember thinking at the time how interesting it was for a dot-com company to be advertising on television, a medium that the Internet hoped to displace entirely within the next decade. By running the ad, NBC seemed to be helping drive viewers from a television screen to a PC screen. But the fact remains that *Monster.com* ran the very first television advertisement I ever saw for a dot-com. And it has stuck with me.

The importance of this becomes more pronounced when I share with you that I am hard-pressed to remember any *other* dot-com television (or banner, billboard, magazine) ad I might have seen since then. That's right. Not one.

What's happened here? Could it be that I don't have the capacity to remember more than one television commercial? While I'm the first to admit that that's a distinct possibility, I think the real reason I am able recall the *Monster.com* ad is that it appeared before the marketing landscape became so saturated with advertising imitators. In the last two years, dot-com companies have cluttered the market space with images vying for our attentions. These companies are pulling out all the stops to build their brands through traditional channels like TV. They're hiring the best directors, actors and technicians to create the most memorable viewing experience. As a result, ads are getting bolder, sexier, and riskier. But it's a losing proposition. The field is so crowded now that it is virtually impossible to present an image that will rise above the clutter that bombards us every day. As consumers, we are becoming immune to the powers of traditional marketing and advertising.

We've heard over and over that building a brand is the most important thing a new company can do. Of course, the brand is directly related to things like product/service price, quality, delivery, and customer service. But the brand captures all of these things and packages them neatly into a memorable (that's the key) experience. For the crowded Internet start-up field, building a brand--and doing so quickly -- is critical. I have found it ironic that Internet start-ups--which are touting new and exciting ways of conducting business--are relying on the older, more traditional marketing strategies to build their brands. Shouldn't their brand-building activities more accurately reflect the cutting-edge, out-of-the-box thinking that is transforming their businesses? According to many experts in the field, the answer is "no." Several leaders told me, "Robert, regardless of whether you're building a brand online or off-line, you're going to use the same principles."

I was just about to begin believing them when I was fortunate enough to meet Di-Ann Eisnor, who approaches brand-building from a different perspective. She recognizes that consumers are faced with marketing message overload and that, in order to reach them, you have to go to where the consumers are. Eisnor is a brand-building entrepreneur who doesn't create ad campaigns from a lofty Madison Avenue tower. She and her team create memorable experiences for consumers right in their own backyards or, as Eisnor claims, "in the street."¹

Marketing as Performance Art

I saw the ad for Eisnor Interactive in *Fast Company* after I had set up a meeting with the company's CEO. The ad presents a strong message and an even stronger image. In it, a young woman is jumping off a subway car. She is full of energy and eager to get somewhere. Most important, she is leaving the clutter and mayhem of the subway behind. She is free. The woman in the ad is Di-Ann Eisnor, CEO of Eisnor Interactive (EI), which develops online brands in the off-line marketplace.

She agreed to meet me in EI's new Boston office. I knew she was young (twenty-seven). I knew she was hip. I knew she was unconventional. I also knew that her business was soaring. Given my preconceived notions, I expected the offices of EI to be similar to those of other new Internet (or Internet-supporting) companies that are springing up all over—cutting-edge, gritty, open. I was surprised, then, to find a small but sophisticated office. Here, it seemed, as much attention had been paid to the physical surroundings as to the virtual branding that took place under its roof. And it all makes sense to me now, after meeting with Di-Ann. EI is an agency that exploits the physical world—the consumer's reality – in order to build an online brand. It is only natural that this attention to physical settings would permeate the work place, as well.

While the offices of EI initially surprised me, Di-Ann Eisnor didn't. She appeared just as I imagined her to be. Although there wasn't a subway car to be seen, she entered the room with the air of a young leader--free, excited by the potentials around her, and impatient with the chaos of all-things "traditional." She exuded the same energy as the woman in the ad. Di-Ann is the EI brand.

She reminded me of a younger, female version of Jack Welch (GE) or Richard Branson (Virgin)--someone who embodies the brand of their company by their very nature. Branson is renowned for inserting himself directly into the customer experience--either by personally apologizing for delayed flights at Heathrow or serving cocktails and playing the guitar on overseas flights. He connects with his public. I knew immediately that Di-Ann would serve a similar role for Eisnor Interactive. When you meet her, you are meeting the EI brand. What you see is what you get. And what you get is a personality and an energy that shouts "we're not your grandparents' branding agency. We're here to give you an unforgettable experience."

Eisnor Interactive is the country's first off-line promotions agency for online brands. Eisnor refers to the group as the "Navy Seals of Marketing." By that she means the forty plus employees of EI do what it takes to show results. More often than not, "what it takes" are real world experiences for individual consumers that drive Internet traffic for her clients in the short-term and customer relationships in the long-term. The New York-based agency (with offices in Boston and San Francisco) has received notoriety and extensive press coverage for its "stunts" that impact people on the street, and get them talking about a digital brand. Clients include Polaroid, Compaq, eGift.com, Reebok and Staples.com. Billings are expected to exceed \$40 million in 2000.

According to Eisnor, the challenge in marketing online brands is teaching a new behavior. She asks provocatively, "How do you interact with something that's not physical? How can consumers have a relationship with a digital brand?" The answer lies in creating real-world

experiences for people in their daily lives. This is very different from the traditional marketing principles that direct passive campaigns.

A Whole New Ball Game

As Di-Ann points out, bricks and mortar corporations of the past had 30 years to build their brand. In the new economy, they have six months. During this period, they must show results for their investors--either in terms of revenue or sales or site traffic. They must also satisfy their other markets as well--trade folks and consumers being just two. How do you build a brand quickly that satisfies all of these stakeholders?

“Traditional brands,” begins Di-Ann, “really think about this concept called branding. It’s a vague, big, fuzzy notion that means ‘spend a minimum of \$50 million talking as loudly as you can to as many people as you can.’ That approach--that sort of clamoring for attention--is no longer relevant.” Rather, Eisnor and her colleagues know they must create an experience that cuts through the clutter of marketing messages, targets their clients’ consumers, and generates results. Traditional advertising can’t do that. “It no longer has meaning for anyone. It’s irrelevant in the Internet era.” What then, to Eisnor, is relevant? What will cause customers to pay attention to--and even talk about--a digital brand in a world cluttered with hundreds of television stations and millions of Web sites?

Out-of-the-box thinking is what generates the public “buzz” that is so important in capturing consumer attention. And, as Eisnor points out, this buzz can be created at very little cost. As an example, rather than buying television spots for clients, EI will place provocative advertisements on the sides of trucks and send them around a city for a day. This is much more effective than passive billboards, which people are more likely to ignore. When an advertisement rolls in front of you as you’re waiting to cross the street or as you’re staring out a cab window, you’re

more likely to take notice.

EI has also hired actors to pose as chauffeurs in airports, holding up signs that read “Client X for Bill Gates.” Passengers--particularly business passengers – disembarking from an airplane are pleased to think they shared a flight with the leader of the computer industry. They hang around, waiting to see Mr. Gates. And they remember the client that was supposedly important enough to pick him up. When About.com was launching its brand, EI used the opportunity to address the common concern that many consumers have about the Internet being a cold and human-less space. The agency covered New York with signs, they “branded” bike messengers, and they created dozens of sandwich boards that simply asked, “Is anybody out there?” The answer revealed that yes, there was someone “out there”--the experts behind the topic areas of About.com.

EI was also the force behind Nicole’s experience outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Nicole picked up one of 10,000 wallets that were dropped throughout New York City that day. That she picked it up indicates an interaction on Nicole’s part. She wasn’t a passive observer to a traditional marketing campaign. Rather, she was involved in the campaign and experienced something unique and exhilarating. She and the 9,999 others who found a wallet that day are much more likely to remember the brand CharityCounts.com than if they had seen a billboard on the side of the road.

According to Eisnor, what distinguishes successful brand-building efforts from less successful ones is the creation of meaning and value for people on the level at which they exist – on the street. EI creates this meaning and value through unique promotions and real-life experiences. Some refer to these efforts as “stunts.” Critics call them “gimmicks.” Whatever they are called, they work. And they work by leveraging two ironies of the Internet economy.

The first is the realization that the most effective way to connect to an increasingly global marketplace is at the “hyper-local” level. “We can

create tangible, 3-D experiences for individual consumers only when we know who the consumer is, where he is, and what's on his mind." That means EI spends a lot of time "on the street," setting up "field offices" in shopping malls, on Wall Street, and in grocery stores to better understand the needs of the individual customer. Once they understand the consumers' needs and recognize what the consumer will respond to, the EI team creates the most visceral experience possible.

This is the second irony of the Internet world that EI uses to its advantage: the more physical the interaction between a brand and a consumer, the greater the impact will be in the virtual world. Eisnor is not naïve to the fact that a lot of the branding of an Internet company takes place on-line. "We know the branding will be successful through the development of a relationship with a Web site. But we try to do things that reinforce that *burn personality* in the real world."

Whenever possible, EI will create real-world experiences that deliver value to the consumer. These are the things that generate word-of-mouth publicity and establish a sense of customer loyalty--even before the customer has visited a Web site. These are the things that "break through the clutter" and capture peoples' attention.

For example, EI launched a branding initiative for Dealtime.com (a shopping comparison site) that provided something of real value to consumers. Specifically, the agency rented buses, branded them with the Dealtime logo and offered free shuttle services for shoppers between all the shopping areas within Manhattan and San Francisco. "It may not sound like much," says Eisnor, "but Dealtime received dozens of thank-you notes with messages like, 'no company has ever done this kind of thing for me before.' We added value to people's day, and it meant something to them. That's the kind of interactive dialogue that builds brands."

"We asked the same question with CarOrder.com," continues Eisnor. "How could we provide value to the potential CarOrder consumer that was directly related to the brand of the Internet company?" The answer?

For one day, EI arranged for CarOrder.com to pay the tolls for everyone coming into Manhattan during a morning rush hour. For subway users, 50,000 branded metro cards were handed out. This value to consumers generated a lot of positive response. CarOrder.com received numerous messages from thankful commuters (and even sold a few cars that day) and also received significant press coverage in the local media for its generosity. These results, coupled with the positive word-of-mouth that was certainly generated by commuters that day, made the one-morning branding push more effective than a television spot could have ever been.

These efforts to provide value to individual consumers have led EI to embark on its most ambitious branding exercise yet. With Half.com (an organized online marketplace that allows visitors to sell high quality, previously owned goods for at least half off list price), EI has launched a campaign that will bring value, not to individual consumers, but to an entire community. Halfway, Oregon is a picturesque town of 360 inhabitants located forty miles southwest of Hells Canyon near the Idaho border. For the year 2000, it has agreed to change its 200 year-old name to Half.com. Seen as one of the cleverest marketing ploys in recent memory, Half.com has become the world's first dot-com city.

The deal is a good one for both the town and the Internet company. The company has already received extraordinary worldwide media coverage for its innovative brand-building exercise (including coverage in the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, CNN, *Good Morning America* and a live broadcast from Half.com, Oregon by NBC's *Today Show* in January 2000). In exchange for the name change, Half.com (the town) will also receive significant exposure--something that might help remedy sagging tourism and economic development in the region. Half.com (the company) has built and hosted a Web site for the town, and contracts with local developers whenever possible. The company is also donating twenty computers to the local elementary school, providing seed money for local businesses, and discounting the price of

Internet access to town residents.

Many outsiders have viewed the Half.com initiative as a mere publicity gimmick. Di-Ann Eisnor disagrees. “In this case, we’re looking at social responsibility as media. Yes, our client is getting what they need in terms of publicity and validity, but the town is benefiting, as well. This is a town that has lost its logging industry and several cottage industries. We’re wiring the schools and homes and investing in the economic development of the town. That’s providing real value to society.” Frankly, I think the Half.com critics are probably angry that they didn’t think of Eisnor’s idea first. What, after all, is gimmicky about channeling money into a community that can really use it? It certainly beats writing an endorsement check to yet another celebrity spokesperson. Sure, EI is getting great publicity from its efforts in half.com, and I would argue, rightly so. The company is making a difference and adding value in a real and tangible way, and deserves to be recognized for its work.

Building on these successes, Eisnor Interactive has developed its own Radical Corporate Responsibilities Initiative (RCRI). This initiative will further explore opportunities to view social responsibility as media opportunities. “The bottom line,” says Eisnor “is that if you provide real news, you’ll get media coverage. It’s not as easy as buying a radio spot, but it’s much more valuable. There’s tremendous opportunity here for clients who can, for example, commit to helping the unemployed or homeless. Working with them, we can develop a solution to a specific problem and take a social stance in the process.”

As an example, EI is currently working with a client and several employment agencies around the country to train and educate 100 people and bring them back into the workforce. “It’s cheaper than running a national TV ad for a month, and costs probably the same amount as running five ads in the *New York Times*. Neither of these traditional marketing techniques do anything to break through ‘the clutter.’ Our program does. We’re planning to help 100 people get back

into the workforce. That's important and compelling. The media will be interested."

Eisnor counts on the media being interested in her socially responsible marketing tactics. She agrees that press hits are important. But what is more important is the opportunity--Eisnor calls it an 'obligation'--for dot-com companies to take a real leadership role in solving the country's problems. "If we can be entrepreneurial and start companies and make a ton of money, we should be able to put that back into society. We're approaching an age in which we shouldn't separate work and charity."

The Half.com initiative clearly shows how the right brand-building exercise will generate more publicity than traditional advertising techniques could. What is less obvious are the cost savings for clients. The Half.com deal cost about \$110,000, a fraction of what it would cost to create one 30-second television commercial. Paying tolls for commuters or distributing wallets throughout New York are similarly cost-effective ways of providing value to consumers and an opportunity to build consumer interest and loyalty.

Take for example the 2000 Super Bowl commercials (like the one that Howard missed at the beginning of this chapter). As many people know, the Super Bowl commercials (particularly those airing in the third and fourth quarters of the game) are the most expensive television spots an advertiser can buy. They pay-off is that the coverage supposedly reaches 135 million worldwide viewers. As Howard demonstrated by his timely trip to the washroom, that figure is perhaps unrealistic. In any event, seventeen dot-coms paid an average of \$2.2 million each to air a Super Bowl commercial in 2000. While many of these (OnMoney.com included) claim that their advertising investment reaped huge pay-offs, industry analysts are not convinced.

One dot-com advertiser claims that traffic increased 550% as a result of the Super Bowl ad. That percentage is indeed impressive, but becomes less so if it translates into an increase in hits from say 200 to 1,300. Another way to look at this sort of advertising investment is to look at

the bare statistics. According to *The Industry Standard*, Internet companies spent a total of \$75 million on television advertising on Super Bowl Sunday. In addition to the broadcasting fees, we can assume that each commercial cost approximately \$500,000 to produce. Media Metrix figures indicate that total traffic to these advertised Internet sites grew by 1.1 million. If we do the math, we can see that it works out to a cost of more than \$75 per new visitor.

For many companies, however, the prestige of advertising with “the big boys” makes the investment worthwhile. For certain Internet companies, those with products or services related to sporting goods or beer, this risk may, indeed, be worthwhile. But what about OurBeginning.com, a site catering to life event planning and targeting, particularly, brides-to-be? Obviously, the Super Bowl audience, the most massive of all mass markets, does not comprise large numbers of this target demographic. Perhaps no one told OurBeginning.com that bit of marketing wisdom, given that the Internet company spent more than \$4 million to air five spots on game day.

According to Di-Ann, taking such a risk on Super Bowl advertising—particularly as a way to *launch* a brand—is irresponsible. “If you’re an established brand, fine. Do a spot on the Super Bowl. The whole country is your market, and this sort of advertising makes sense. But it’s just ridiculous to launch your company – and spend your entire marketing budget – with one Super Bowl ad.” That kind of straight talk is indicative of a young, energetic leader in the emerging Internet market space.

Stunt Woman

Di-Ann Eisnor attributes her success to what she doesn’t know. “I start from scratch with all my thinking. I’ve never learned the things that I would need to unlearn now.” In fact, Di-Ann Eisnor knows quite a bit. Armed with a double major in painting and business from NYU, common sense, ambition, and the support of a mother who encouraged her to

follow her dreams, Di-Ann began her marketing career at Dentsu, a large Japanese agency. After college, she moved to Dentsu's European headquarters and rose to the rank of senior account executive. This was in the early 90s, before the advent of online marketing. When she returned to New York in 1995, she signed on with SiteSpecific, an early Internet Direct Marketing company whose clients (a mix of traditional companies and Internet start-ups) were making their first forays onto the Web with brochure-ware. Two years later, SiteSpecific was sold to CKS.

“As soon as the CKS deal was inked,” says Eisnor, “I left the company to start Eisnor Interactive. I knew I had a combination of skills in off-line and online promotions, and I knew my clients at SiteSpecific were asking, ‘what’s next?’ They realized that they were going to have to do something new and different to break through the usual marketing ‘clutter’ in order to build relationships and brands with their customers. Based on my skills and what clients were asking for, the creation of Eisnor Interactive was a natural evolution. It’s what needed to happen.”

She formed Eisnor Interactive as an off-line promotions agency for online brands. Put another way, Di-Ann and her colleagues went into business to help digital clients develop relationships with consumers. “There was, and is, a real barrier there. As an example, one of our first clients had been successful in using online advertising to generate traffic to their Web site. But their market, at the time, was quite small. As the market grew and competitors came onto the scene, it became much more important for the client to be able to ensure potential customers that there was a “real” company and “real” people behind the Web site. Their existing promotions didn’t engender the same type of feeling a customer enjoys when walking into a shop. We helped them realize that if you make an effort to talk to your customers and, above all, are *relevant* to their needs, you’ll have a much better chance of securing their loyalty.”

Di-Ann and her colleagues did for this client what they do best - they created a program whereby they would talk to people on the streets, create 3-D experiences for consumers to remember, and come away with

a solid understanding of their thoughts and concerns about particular products and services. These conversations, carried on by trained actors and accompanied by innovative product giveaways, revealed a lot of useful information for the client. “This is where we differ from traditional branding promotions,” explains Eisnor. “We provide a forum for customers to interact and share information with us. And we use that information, something many companies don’t do. We recognize that what we do allows two-way communication. Traditional branding can’t claim to do that.”

Like her mother before her, Di-Ann has learned by doing. She’s been fortunate not to have worked for companies that stifled her energy. Instead, they allowed her to follow her own intuition. Eisnor still follows that intuition in all of her decision-making: “If it feels right, I just have to go in that direction.” That direction is the right one. The company is now two and a half years old and has been profitable since the first quarter. Ironically, EI doesn’t have to do much to market itself. “Most of our new clients come to us through word-of-mouth, public relations, and friends we have in the industry.” Many others are drawn to EI’s reputation as a cutting-edge marketing leader in online branding.

In its short history, EI has carved out a space in which it has created a hybrid scenario of marketing that falls “somewhere between traditional branding and direct response initiatives. Something new is emerging in that space, and it’s very exciting.” In addition to clients, investors are also taking notice. EI has recently signed a strategic alliance with Omnicom, which will not only allow EI to expand more rapidly, but also supply knowledge and resources to Eisnor’s management team. “Venture capitalists give you money,” explains Eisnor. “But strategic alliances give you so much more. I’m very excited by what we’ll be able to learn from Omnicom.”

Stunt Leader

Di-Ann Eisnor is the first to admit that the new economy calls for new leadership. As she recently revealed in a ChannelSeven.com interview, “We need leaders who collaborate rather than dictate, who inspire rather than restrain, and who manage by example rather than through distributing tasks.” With these words, she’s certainly describing herself. The example she is setting is one of personifying the brand of EI – bold, different, risky, excited.

Eisnor credits EI’s success on the team she has been able to assemble. “They are amazing. I learn so much from them every day.” At EI, there is plenty of opportunity to learn, given that a large portion of each day is devoted to brainstorming and, simply enough, talking to one another. The forty employees that make up Eisnor’s team come from all walks of life. Some come from other agencies; others come from the music industry or directly from a retail environment. Some have business experience, others don’t. What they share is a creative energy, similar vision, and an understanding of the Internet medium.

“We don’t hire for a given position,” explains Eisnor. “We hire based on the question, ‘do we like this person?’ If we do, we find a role for them that will best leverage their strengths. If you hire someone and put them in a position that they’re good at, doing what they love doing, then you have a fully leveraged team. That’s the most efficient--and most fun--way to work.” This hiring strategy is certainly paying off. In an industry where employee turnover is high, EI has never fired an employee. And only one person has quit. “I’m constantly thinking of ways to ensure that our employees feel like they’re making a valuable contribution.”

Di-Ann Eisnor’s creative management style is not confined to within the walls of her office. Managers at EI manage by finding people’s strengths and allowing them to flourish. Above all, managers are expected to lead by creative example. Creative thinking is encouraged in

other ways, too. “We have programs that invite outsiders to come in and tell us how they go about thinking and making decisions--people like Joost Elffers (author of *48 Laws of Power*, *Play with your Food*, and *Secret Language of Birthdays*) and Amnon Levav (university professor who has founded a company dedicated to creative problem-solving). These types of people inspire us to think more creatively.” EI’s staff is regularly encouraged to make 10-minute presentations to the agency staff about something, anything, having to do with the e-economy. This allows them to expand their own thinking into different areas. In addition, employees who have been with EI for two years receive a four-week paid sabbatical in order to pursue their own inspirations.

Eisnor admits that one of the reasons for the creative success of EI has to do with the relatively small size of the staff. “People are here because we’re building something great. I expect that once we outgrow tribal size (about 100 folks), we may see a little more turnover and a slight cultural shift. We’re trying to keep each office small in size (around 15 people) to prevent this.”

Di-Ann Eisnor is most pleased with the fact that EI’s core focus and philosophy are the same as they were the first day of the company. With her team, Eisnor has been able to create a unique culture, client base, a connection with consumers, and philosophy that drives an aggressive approach to getting things done. It is clear that she continues to enjoy what she is doing. Her energy is infectious. Her vision is focused and clear. “I took a risk when I founded this company, but I’ll continue taking it every day as long as I feel what we are doing is relevant. I am the CEO because every company needs an ultimate leader. But I really think of myself as much more a catalyst for the team. And without them, the agency wouldn’t exist.”

Di-Ann Eisnor is a catalyst. A brand representative. A leader. She has made me believe that these words are most likely synonymous in the e-Economy.

About the Author

Robert Hargrove is a world-renowned, revolutionary thought leader in the field of talent development and coaching. His motto is *Better Leaders, Better World* and he believes that coaching leaders to achieve an Impossible Future is the fastest, most powerful way to achieve both.

Hargrove is the founder of Masterful Coaching and served as a Director of the Harvard Leadership Research Project. He has been awarded for Distinguished Public Service by the United States government for his coaching work with political leaders.

Hargrove has also played a pivotal and highly instrumental role in rebranding campaigns in companies like Adidas, Philips Electronics, Estee Lauder, and the National Hockey League.

Hargrove's coaching approach is one of the only methods which delivers real ROI. According to one client, "*We pretty much stuck with the Masterful Coaching approach and it made the company hundreds of millions of dollars.*"

Hargrove is the author of best selling business book *Masterful Coaching* and many other books on leadership, coaching and collaboration.

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