

WOULD YOU TRUST YOUR BRAND TO THESE MEN?

How Canada's fastest growing agency found one key to success: *fun*.



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The upstart ANTIBODY came on the scene just five years ago with a new business model, a new attitude and a new way to think about agency culture. Here's how they broke into the top ranks and had a great time doing it.

You won't find the word "fun" written into many corporate mission statements, but you will at ANTIBODY, a new breed of pharmaceutical agency that has had fun right from the start—throwing out the rulebooks.

For ex-Director of Marketing, James Cran and veteran pharma Creative Director Michael Paul, starting a new shop was an opportunity to re-invent everything. Cran listed all the things that nagged him as a client: the broken promise of a true strategic partnership, the shallow medical knowledge, the lax response times and the "yes-man" syndrome.

Paul wanted to rid the world of creative with bizarre visuals and "smiling people riding bicycles" to get to more powerful ideas that really moved business.



They both agreed that the industry was often bogged down in detail and over-thinking and there was an urgent need to cut through it all. "Simplify" became the company's credo.



The Wig Project: You never know when your turn will come.

They even changed agency terminology for the first time. Account Executives were replaced by Product Associates and Product Directors. Their mandate: "Get to know your brand better than your client does."

And when it came to the agency culture, they really got down to business. Ditching the phony 'rah-rah' morale building and striving for something genuine, a company



ANTIBODY staff members make good use of the agency's hub, "The Big Table."

where people looked forward to coming to work. The trick would be to create one that not only fired up staff, but also paid off for clients.

Hiring became an art form. Cran: "We put an extraordinary emphasis on personality. We look for interesting people, nice people. You get a bunch of terrific, smart people together, it's already more fun—and you can really deliver."

No secrets there. Meanwhile, bookstore Business Sections are full of management primers on corporate culture offering up the latest techniques for making employees happy, everything from nap breaks to free cafeterias. But for ANTIBODY it was a matter of keeping things, well, simple. If there is a "secret sauce" it seems to lie with socializing a lot as a group—but in delightfully screwball ways.

And oh, there is madness to their methods: one summer event duped the dismayed staff into thinking they were going to Medieval Times, the bus even pulling up to the door before whisking them to a pier where the "SS Minnow," with Cran and Paul dressed as The Captain and Gilligan, were waiting. The boat soon "broke down" and the confused crew had to disembark on a "deserted" Toronto island, finally arriving at a surprise beach



When managers aren't afraid to make fun of themselves, as in this internal video, staff can relax and have fun too.



Hooping it up at Camp ANTIBODY.

“If you can make it here, you’ll never make it anywhere.” (Irony seems to be in the walls at the agency).

But it’s far from being just fun and games. In between the sports, campfires and dining hall camaraderie are workshops on presentation skills, agency structure and speakers on pharmaceutical marketing and sales.

The goings-on stem largely from the partners’ own personalities. The Managing Director, Cran, is the ebullient, gregarious one, affectionately called JC or “Cranman” by staff. Paul, the suit-and-tie wearing copy pro, is more reserved, albeit prone to launching into old school, stand-up comedy.



Pushing limits and trying new things are part of the fun.



ANTIBODY staffers dress up for Halloween as their favorite historical figure: CD Michael Paul.

But when it comes to their agency and its clients, the pair is deadly serious. This is no work hard, play hard thing. It’s more like work harder, play harder. Every social event includes a presentation on the agency’s progress that is refreshingly transparent. Making people feel part of something is woven into everything.

The result is that while the atmosphere is loose, the work ethic is taut. The emphasis is on professionalism and responsiveness.

One client even requested that ANTIBODY slow down, since answers to requests were flowing back faster than their team could manage.

There were big changes to the physical plant as well. ANTIBODY looks a lot like a drug company, but more open and with a much flatter structure (“Only two doors to slam”). There is a help-yourself buffet of healthy foods always available to staff all day long, so there’s no scrounging for a cracker when working late, which the staff does often.



Attention Campers: Two days of sports and activities interspersed with workshops on pharmaceutical selling and presentation skills.



Even in-house team building posters don't take team building seriously. Staff members wrote their own captions.

Food is big here; lunch is brought in on the company regularly. A 24-foot long table is the agency’s communal hub.

It’s a work table, staff lunch table, and meeting place. It’s where all staff meetings are held and where they take a break, socialize, or just hang out at a regular Friday wind-down.

“One thing that used to really bug me as a client,” JC says, “is being constantly introduced to new agency people all the time, then having to train them.” ANTIBODY turnover is startlingly low, in fact it’s zero. In five years, the agency has not lost an employee except to spousal re-location or maternity.

Fine, all the shenanigans appear to have created a family atmosphere and a highly motivated team of

people, but has it done the big job? Has it translated into happy clients?

One statistic would seem to bear that out: since it opened its doors, ANTIBODY has never been fired by a client. **CPM**