

Special Issue: Freedom and Success

JULY 2010

# Winning the Web

THE DIGITAL BUSINESS MONTHLY

## ▶ Lessons from Lincoln

WHAT THE AMERICAN TRADITION OF FREEDOM MEANS TO YOUR BUSINESS

## ▶ One hot flash!

HOW EMBASSY SUITES TARGETS YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

## ▶ Rooms to spare!

WHY HOTELS.COM IS IN A CATEGORY ALL THEIR OWN



COVER STORY:

**VICTOR OWENS**

VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING NORTH AMERICA HOTELS.COM

# Brand uniforms

The shirt on your back may be the perfect link to a digital marketing campaign.

**THE DREAM OF EVERY MARKETER** is to find a way to get consumers to live their entire lives wrapped up in a network of complementary products and services. Linking two websites is child's play, literally. But linking what you wear with an entire social network – that's a job for Jared Golden and Amish Tolia, two guys with a golden idea they picked up in a college classroom, of all the goofy places. They tell all in this month's Contender file:

## 1. WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

We've applied the ad-network model to the world of custom apparel. Our platform – at [apparelmediagroup.com](http://apparelmediagroup.com) – enables brands to engage millions of consumers with interactive campaign messaging by placing it on custom t-shirts that are purchased by sports teams, student organizations and special events. Consumers seek out and accept brand messaging for their custom apparel because they receive a direct benefit when purchasing from producers in our network – lower pricing. This drives a high degree of engagement, effectively turning consumers into brand advocates and points of distribution for the messaging they wear. Apparel advertising is a perfect tie-in to brands' existing digital and social-media campaigns because it creates that tangible offline to online traction.

## 2. WHEN WERE YOU FOUNDED AND WHERE ARE YOU BASED?

Apparel Media Group was founded in 2009 and is based in Chicago.

## 3. HOW MANY PEOPLE WORK THERE?

We've grown from three founders to eight full-time employees and a half-dozen campus media coordinators.

## 4. WHOSE IDEA WAS THIS?

We've been in the custom apparel business for about five years, and our customers have consistently asked for sponsorship for their apparel projects. The idea to provide singular access to millions of t-shirts nationwide by creating a network was initiated by Gerry Hays, our Co-Founder and former college professor. The two of us met Gerry while taking his class at Indiana University.

5. What have you discovered since launching that surprised you? We initially set out to create a low-tech, high-engagement marketing platform by capitalizing on tangible offline real estate. But during one of our first pilot campaigns, we discovered we had actually created a social marketing platform. Since we're placing ads on apparel that people are proud to wear both during and after special events, those ads often end up in pictures posted to social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. Countless additional social media engagements are created when those pictures are tagged, forwarded, retweeted, and viewed by additional consumers.

## 6. WHAT'S YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE, PAST, PRESENT OR FUTURE?

In pioneering a new direct marketing channel, our greatest challenge is client education. More than sales, this is about positioning our platform as a cross-channel complement to existing digital and offline marketing efforts. Today, having demonstrated the value of spending on meaningful consumer engagement,

# Contender File

THE NEXT WINNING IDEA'S ON THE RADAR

we can feel the ball starting to roll downhill and are working to expand our team to handle the demand for regional and national campaigns. As we grow, we'll have to work hard to recruit the best and brightest folks to continue to deliver exceptional results.



[WWW.APPARELMEDIAGROUP.COM](http://WWW.APPARELMEDIAGROUP.COM)

## 7. ANY NUMBERS THAT CAN TELL US WHERE YOU STARTED? WHERE YOU ARE NOW? WHERE YOU THINK YOU'LL BE IN A YEAR? FIVE?

We started with a simple idea: to create a system that would enable brands to connect with consumers through custom apparel. Today, through exclusive partnerships with major apparel producers around the country, our network provides access to millions of custom apparel units representing billions of square feet of marketing real estate. We've run successful campaigns for companies of all sizes, ranging from startups like Formspring.me to established brands such as Hertz. In the next year, we plan to open a second office in NYC and expand upon our social media tie-in programs. We've turned grass-roots marketing into a science, and our goal is to be considered the number-one platform for generating a high level of engagement with hard-to-reach consumers.

## 8. HOW WILL YOU KNOW WHEN YOU'VE REACHED YOUR GOAL?

Marketers are having a harder time than ever showing consumers they really mean it. In today's world of total advertising saturation, the way to stand out is to empower consumers, to position a brand as a means of expression. Our platform does this by providing the opportunity for brands to align with the thing consumers care about the most—community. This drives positive word of mouth, triggers buzz and causes conversations to proliferate through online and offline social circles, creating a truly lasting impact. Once hundreds of brands are utilizing our platform to connect with their target consumers in local organizations from the Over-40 bowling league in Seattle, Washington, to the Komen Race for the Cure in Jacksonville, Florida, we'll know we've made a splash.