How an Agency Cut Through ‘Purpose Clutter’ With Its Bookstore Campaign Trolling Amazon

In this David-versus-Goliath battle, mom-and-pop bookstores wrapped themselves in Amazon’s familiar brown cardboard as a protest against the retail giant and a plea to shop local.

The Instagram-ready stunt, with Amazon lookalike boxes covered in sick literary burns and topical quips, came courtesy of DCX Growth Accelerator, a Brooklyn-based agency that’s known for projects like Palessi, a fake Italian boutique that hawked $20 Payless shoes to fashion influencers, and Jesse’s Deli, a bodega that got a ridiculous hipster makeover as an anti-gentrification statement.

Senior leaders at the company, working with the nonprofit American Booksellers Association on the #BoxedOut campaign, said they’re energized by creating programs that side with the underdog and spotlight a societal pain point.

Doug Cameron, chief strategy and creative officer, and Tommy Noonan, executive creative director, spoke to Adweek as the program rolled out about leaning into their MacGyver-like skills, finding their populist voice and performing their version of cultural jujitsu.

Adweek: Elaborate on the goals of this American Booksellers Association event that launched this week and how that speaks to your agency’s personality.
Doug Cameron: Tommy and I have been creative partners for about 17 years now, and this is becoming our specialty. We latch onto these cultural tensions and dramatize them in a

humorous way, whether it’s the issue of fashion influencers and materialism or a bodega being priced out of the neighborhood. We look at a cultural issue and unpack it.

How did you approach the program with the ABA?
Cameron: We thought about how omnipresent those Amazon boxes are—they’re in the lobbies of your buildings, on your neighbor’s porch. We wanted to say, “Here’s what’s going on with small businesses and indie bookstores as a result of that box showing up on the doorstep.” We hope no one will ever look at those boxes the same way again.

There was a lightning-quick turnaround and a lot of multitasking?
Tommy Noonan: We presented the final idea on Sept. 23 and got into production within a week and a half. We tried to get production companies on board, but the timeline was too fast. So we pulled it in-house and worked with some printers around the country.

Cameron: It was the same with Payless. We just took it over and did it ourselves, which meant we had to think through every single detail. Tommy came up with a new word—proactivator—because we’re handling the ideas and the activations. We like to experiment and work with our hands. We’ve decided to embrace that. It brings the whole agency together.

Tommy, since your boots were on the ground for the stunt’s installation in New York, tell us what was happening.
Noonan: I was at Greenlight [Bookstore] and Community [Bookstore] first thing this morning. [Then I was] filling up sand bags to hold down displays in front of Cafe con Libros in Brooklyn. And just in the time we’d been here, we must’ve seen at least 12 or 14 push carts full of Amazon boxes go past us.

It’s part of the landscape, so we’re making note of that.

On the creative side, how did you find the right tone and decide where to draw the line?
Cameron: Fans of bookstores are a savvy, intellectual group, and the client pushed us to go for it, with a bit of a wink and a tongue-in-cheek approach. What we’ve learned from things like Jesse’s Deli is that you need to speak from a populist voice within the subculture you’re representing. And pay close attention to the humor and the visuals. Being bold was extremely important to the success of the project.

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Pages: 1 2

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