Last Year, Quantasy Acquired a Legendary Shop. Here are Some Lessons Learned



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In the pantheon of multicultural agencies, Muse in Los Angeles was long considered one of its leading lights. Founder Jo Muse built a powerful presence in the space over three decades, working with major brands like Honda, Nike, the Office of National Drug Control Policy, the U.S. Army, Wells Fargo and others.

Meanwhile, in the same city, Will Campbell founded Quantasy + Associates in 2012, focused on the intersection of entertainment, advertising and culture, with an emphasis on technology. It was a crucial time for agencies as brands found rich territory in consumer behaviors like the shift to mobile, on-demand content, social sharing, and second- and third-screen experiences. Campbell got out of the gate with Honda, Google, Farmers Insurance and Wells Fargo.

The pedigree and tenure of Muse’s classic branding presence

and the forward-thinking vision of Campbell and Quantasy seemed a perfect match. At first, Muse subcontracted Quantasy for digital projects and Campbell, who built interactive brand strategies earlier in his career for the likes of Disney, Fox Sports and Universal Music, forging a strong relationship from the outset.

“At the time, Quantasy was growing and finding new clients,” recalled Campbell, CEO of the combined agencies. “I had conversations with Jo about the right formula to build from, and talked to him about what an acquisition would look like.”

After some back-and-forth, the duo had a deal. Yet, unlike other agency mergers and acquisitions, both Muse and Quantasy had a successful history together.

“We had been working closely with clients for a long time,” Campbell said. “This wasn’t a scenario where it was some kind of mathematical deal. There was an alignment of values, purpose and intention. It was an elevation of something that was already working.”

Adweek caught up with Campbell, who was fresh off the agency’s first virtual Essence Festival, to find out what he’s learned over the past year-plus after the acquisition.

People may not realize what a big deal this was—especially since Muse had built a strong reputation over time, and Quantasy was a relative newcomer. What were the client conversations like?
Campbell: For me, it was about putting the needs of the client first. We put it on the table with the clients, because we knew it was important for them to be into the idea. And they unanimously supported it.

We had the benefit of the proven track record of the work we were doing together. I think that they all saw, particularly with the way the market was progressing, the need for advertising to evolve beyond just “advertising,” by bringing

some of these emerging tactics into the mix more seamlessly, and to have it all on one platform. When it happened, people thought, “Wow, this [deal] is interesting,” but that’s partly what excited clients. And then it became really great for new clients to see a different approach and thinking in terms of how to build an agency.

Sometimes, cultures don’t necessarily click. How have you navigated that?
That’s probably the thing that I was warned about the most. We sought out counsel from people that have done this before. I talked to people that I know and trust in my network, and consultants to get their take on it.

Often, M&A is associated with operational efficiencies and those kinds of things. So you’ll see significant job loss and removal of duplication and those kinds of things. But because those weren’t goals that we had, we were really able to mitigate that and demonstrate that that’s not what this was about. We did have to make some pivots over the past year in terms of operational infrastructure, and how work gets developed under one roof at two different companies with two different processes. We hired a COO, Shana Pereira, and she’s been really great implementing a lot of the operational infrastructure to bring the companies together.

How have both organizations played to each others’ strengths?
One of Muse’s real strengths over the years was insights into multicultural strategy. And then, by integrating that strength with the data, analytics tools and practices that Quantasy brought to the table, it was magical and opened those two worlds up.

What are some of the most important leadership lessons you’re learned over the past year?
I learned how important it is to be prepared to pivot. Entrepreneurs, in general, are resilient and have a vision. But I think with that comes an ability to be OK with changing

your mind [and direction]. That’s what I’ve learned over the past year: how important it is to walk away from an idea or a concept that you love, and to be able to anticipate change and move toward it.

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