Publicis Sapient Chief Experience Officer Joins Tech Company Focused on Disaster Management

Publicis Sapient's chief experience officer is leaving the agency to join a tech company focused on disaster management working, in part, to fight Covid-19 via contact tracing.

John Maeda is exiting the role but will remain at Publicis Sapient in an advisory capacity as chair of the experience advisory council. He was unable to share further details about the company he is joining or his new role, except to say it is a Massachusetts-based SaaS company tackling Covid-19, weather disasters and being "high-centered on saving human lives."

"John is an exceptional leader and has made a real impact continuing to strengthen our experience capability, and its connection to strategy and engineering, to help our clients create value for their customers through superior products and experiences. I'm delighted that we will continue to benefit from his design expertise as chair of our experience advisory council," Publicis Sapient CEO Nigel Vaz said in a statement. "As we all know, in early 2020, the world changed. It's clear that Publicis Sapient's highly skilled people can make a vital contribution to protecting public health in the face of the coronavirus crisis, and I feel great pride that John has chosen to answer that calling."

Maeda took on the chief experience officer role in 2019. His career includes a variety of leadership positions across various tech companies, agencies and educational institutions,

including serving as global head, computational design and inclusion at Automattic, design partner at Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers and board member for Sonos and Wieden + Kennedy.

It’s unclear when or if a successor will be named in the chief experience officer role, but Maeda did give some indication of how the process might play out with his departure.

“At Publicis Sapient in experience, we’ve adopted the Rooney Rule for succession planning of leaders. That means that for every slate of successors to any leader in my capability, there needs to be at least one woman or underrepresented minority in that list,” Maeda said in an emailed response to Adweek. “It was a simple way to assurdly #makeroom for the next generation of leadership in experience to become more diverse—and then I started to look at myself. … I saw myself needing to set the example by making room for them to lead as they were already brilliantly doing.”

Maeda told Adweek in a phone interview that his departure for the new role “serves two purposes.”

“I believe in women leaders at all levels. … I’m leaving a bevy of women leaders. They’re all amazing. I’m trying to make room,” he said.

He said he recruited Wendy Johansson, group vice president, experience to join Publicis Sapient’s experience design team “specifically because I knew that we shared a passion for inclusion across race, gender, age, language” as well as for her logistical expertise which helped the experience team evolve into an “outcome-based” solution.

Maeda also cited leaders including associate creative director Sara Alloy; senior experience designer Isi Azu; director, experience design Britta Alexander; svp, experience Karin Giefer, executive experience director Laura Licari; Publicis Sapient Singapore head of experience Jaz Lim; associate

creative director Deepali Nayar and associate creative director Chelsea Watson.

“We all created a communications code of conduct that is available on our GitHub repository as a way to ensure that our online communication tools would constitute a safe space for women and underrepresented minorities,” Maeda said, calling it one of his proudest accomplishments at Publicis Sapient.

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