

# Making brands a reality

AGI tells Elizabeth Toppin the thinking behind its rebranding, how special packaging can boost sales, and the importance of a complete range of services

**A**GI Media UK offers a range of services from creative and multimedia solutions to online artworking systems and asset management. Clients include major home entertainment names: Buena Vista, Disney, Paramount, Universal and Fox, for instance, along with the big game companies and music labels. Special packaging, point of sale, you name it, when it comes to packaging and marketing, AGI can pretty much provide whatever you want.

The company, part of US-based giant MeadWestvaco, is a "global leader in packaging and packaging solutions for the cosmetics and personal care, healthcare and pharmaceuticals, food and beverage, and media industries. We service not only the major studio's but up and coming studios,

games and non-media clients; our creativity and wish to give our clients the best service knows no bounds." Recently, the company carried out a major rebranding exercise (full story in the news section on page 6) to become MWV. However, due to the pulling power of the AGI brand, that will remain a major part of the company's identity.

"AGI is staying as it is for the short term – AGI Media – but it will have much more of a global aspect," says Tracy Sheldon, marketing director, AGI Media Europe. "Although it is a well-established name in the US, MeadWestvaco is not quite as well known in Europe. As AGI we will be working to raise awareness of the synergy between our parent company MWV, and AGI, and our brand will include the new MWV ribbon.

"Our customer service can range from a small regional product for individual clients to a massive global campaign. In fact, we are currently working on a large project that will be co-ordinated between the US and Europe for a global launches.

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**"Companies definitely need to be more creative. There is research that indicates a direct link between special packaging and increases in sales"**

Packaging hi-def media: Planet Earth for the BBC



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“This will be a big advantage, allowing us to go to either end of the scale for our customers.”

The creative aspect of packaging and marketing campaigns has always been an essential part of the AGI service, Sheldon stresses. “Fundamentally we can take a blank piece of paper, provide a design and take that all the way through to printing the elements and supplying them. Our capabilities include design, repro, artwork, localisation and print, and we can also provide some specialised fulfilment.”

Basically, what the customer wants, the customer gets: “Anything that the customer would require we can handle. That includes managing work flow, project planning and a range of other services.”

### Enhancing efficiency

The slowdown in the optical media industry means that customers are increasingly looking not just to save costs but also to reduce the number of vendors and ensure that their own businesses run as efficiently as possible. This means that requests for help with project management and work flow/localisation projects are increasing.

“Efficiency is important and we bring in concepts such as Six Sigma [now considered the most popular management methodology in history] and lean manufacturing to help our customers who are looking for the most

effective way of getting their product to market quickly. Obviously the quicker you can get it to market the more chance you will get the sale.

“Because of our collaborative systems, and our close team ethics, we have a print team and a global procurement team, and we can buy and source in bulk. We can work from the creative pitch of design and package material type through to launch. With project management, we can put someone on the account who will co-ordinate all the elements and take it through from concept to delivery.

“We’ve actually been doing that for some time but now there is more of an increase in the service element of our industry. We’re bringing those capabilities across to our clients and letting them know about the full range of services available to them.”

Sheldon likens the AGI range of services to a supermarket. “Our customers have a shopping basket; we tell them what we can provide and they choose as many elements of our service as they need.

“It’s all about making brands a reality.”

With a dedicated account manager, AGI can often be more *au fait* with the various strands of a client’s product than the clients themselves. “This works



The Ultimate Bourne Collection set for Universal

particularly well with the links between the territories in Europe and the bigger clients in the US. We are a central hub, and we co-ordinate a lot of the information – that way we know what needs to be done on a project and we can act as a conduit to share that information in a way that the client can control and manage – it’s a gain without the pain for them.”

Apart from the obvious advantages of better planning all around, there is a more concrete benefit in terms of economics, Sheldon says. “With a more closely controlled organisation, it not only

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**Tracy Sheldon: "Project management is an important added-value service"**

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helps everyone to plan better, but it also means the clients get their product to launch quicker and saves them some money in those soft areas that don't often get considered. Instead of having 20 people order a number of slightly different items around the world, we can help them consolidate and get a brand to market in the fastest, most cost-effective manner so they can start making money on that brand. It's common sense."

Common sense is something that can be in short supply when replicators are being pushed from both ends to turn product around quickly, make it look good, and not cost too much. False economies have caused problems for more than one company, and Sheldon emphasises that saving money is not just about cutting costs but, as in the example above, saving money and making life easier for clients by reducing the number of complicated processes and aiding the communication.

"There are a number of companies that do special packaging, for instance, and there are companies that can provide workflow management. Others can offer services such as copy writing and translation, or website services and advertising development. However, not only can we provide all of those elements, but we've been doing so for a number of years. Now, with our rebranding and consolidation under our parent company, we are pulling all of those elements together more effectively than ever."

For instance, clients previously might ask for a design idea that they would then take through to print and product stage themselves. AGI can take the whole project through from concept to delivery, and more customers are beginning to realise and reap the benefits of a total service.

"We are getting far more requests for us to deal directly with those areas. AGI has moved from just being a printer that had a creative division and could design and do artwork, to providing everything and handling entire projects, including marketing campaigns."

That, Sheldon stresses, does not preclude the company continuing to provide solo print jobs for customers, and she refers back to her shopping basket concept of customers choosing how much or how little they want to buy. A function of how the optical media industry is changing dictates that many customers are increasingly opting for more.

"Project management is an important added-value service. A lot of clients don't have the teams that they had before, even though the work volume hasn't necessarily decreased. Where there might once have been teams of 10 to 30 people, now there may be four or five people who are still expected to get a brand to market. Customers rely on our project management – we don't just provide a design, hand it over and leave it at that."

The short-run, fast turnaround model is something else that packaging companies are being asked to help with.

"The power has shifted from the studios who used to hold all the power, to the retailers who have changed how they sell packaged media. The Wal-Marts of this world shift titles in volumes and so they have more control over what goes into their shops. That means it has to appeal to them, so that puts more pressure on our clients, who turn to us to help them get their products noticed and make sure they get that shelf space."

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### Online opportunities

Sheldon agrees with the view that many in the industry have expressed recently: that the perceived threat of downloading has increased the demand for special packaging, emphasising the 'touchy-feely' tactile advantages that physical media has over a downloaded file.

"Companies definitely need to be more creative. There is a big growth in the proportion of media sales, and, in addition, there is research that indicates a direct link between special packaging and increases in sales: in one study, 84% of consumers say it makes the DVD stand out on a shelf, and 52% say it makes the product feel more premium. Other figures are that 20% of the people on one panel say they like to collect series of DVDs in special packaging, and 20% are prepared to pay more. Packaging persuaded 25% of people to buy a DVD when they were not intending to buy one."

Things may not be as bad as some people think, Sheldon says: "For instance, there has been a big film resurgence with revenue of \$55 million, which is an 11% sales increase. There is also a massive increase in online shopping, and people buying their physical media online, so we change that communication mode and make it more interactive for them."

Lest people think that this removes the touchy-feely element, AGI also creates animated pack shots for clients who are selling their products through

online retailers. "When the consumer clicks onto a website, the animation shows what the package looks like, how it opens, how the disc can be taken out. That makes up for the lack of tactile feel that you get in a high street store."

People who say they are willing to pay more for special packaging do actually act as they say. Special packaging makes people buy 35% more DVDs every year, contributing about 30% of the total spend in the DVD market.

"We are specialists in special packaging, so we are often asked about, and have an R&D department, for it. Increasingly, for the bigger premium titles, we are making presentations and suggestions. There was once a cutback on special packaging but now, with titles such as *High School Musical*, for instance, there has been a huge amount of merchandising for that across the board. There is a lot more you can do with the right title and the right creative ideas: and our clients have some fantastic conceptual ideas and working with them we make them a reality."

Of course, it does have to be the right titles, as Sheldon points out, as special packaging for too many titles would flood the market and defeat the purpose of making certain titles stand out. In that sense, AGI's role is increasingly to be more proactive, both in helping customers with requests, but also in helping to identify titles that would benefit from special packaging. "We have some great POP/POS designs and some really different business models in this area too, which really enhance the campaign role.

"As I said, we are moving our image from being just a print company to re-educating our customers about existing and new capabilities, and the huge breadth of knowledge we have. At AGI we are part of a long-established company with 24,000 employees in 30 different countries. Imagine the breadth of knowledge we can pull in."

Among that breadth of knowledge, and something that is central to AGI and MeadWestvaco, providing a theme that runs through all its work, is sustainability. "That is absolutely key to us, and has been a core competence for us for a number of years. This is not just a marketing tool or 'greenwash' – we have been involved in this area for more than 35 years and we are constantly learning and sharing the information we have, often assisting our clients with their queries and research." ●



**Be very afraid: vacuum-packed clamshell for *The Fly* mimicking the movie's pod**