

A CONVERSATION WITH JUSTIN EDGE

KNOW catches up with the dynamic new leader of Knowledge Networks' New York Client Service practice

WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS?

The appeal of a fresh, innovative upstart in our industry was a powerful lure. I had watched Knowledge Networks develop from afar over the past several years. They always struck me as a company on a real mission to change the industry, to move the game to a new level. And I always believed the team had a genuinely fresh approach to creating powerful consumer insights.

CAN YOU TELL US MORE?

Leading the New York office is a challenge I embraced for professional and personal reasons. On the professional side, in my last role I had built and led successful branding

and healthcare practices for a well-known market research firm. As much as I enjoyed heading up practice groups, I was eager to lead and evolve the business from a more holistic perspective, and this is exactly what happens when you guide an office—you quickly become immersed in every facet of our client relationships and the development of our talent. It is an immensely fulfilling and energizing experience.

AND ON THE PERSONAL SIDE?

My wife and I had always wanted to live in the New York area. Mind you, we liked Chicago, but embracing a “New York State of Mind” was something we wanted.



**TELL US A LITTLE BIT MORE ABOUT
YOUR BACKGROUND.**

As I mentioned, I bring to my clients extensive functional experience in the areas of brand and marketing strategy, and industry experience in the field of healthcare, with a particular track record of helping companies successfully launch new pharmaceutical brands. But I am also a man of many interests. During my career,

and even product placement in interactive videogames. Meanwhile, cable and satellite systems are enabling advertisers to put much more targeted spending programs in place. However, to take advantage of all these options, clients are realizing that they often need to upgrade their capabilities for navigating through a massive amount of new information that can guide them to better media buying decisions.

Clients are also extremely concerned about the equity in their brands in this post-Enron, -Tyco, and -WorldCom era. It is no longer enough to manage the corporate reputation among investors; it means remaining true to brand values at the product-brand level as well as the

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I have helped global corporations navigate their way through issues of consumer loyalty, corporate reputation, pricing, product configuration, and lots more.

**WHAT ISSUES ARE KEEPING YOUR CLIENTS
AWAKE AT NIGHT?**

Probably many of the same issues we all face in running a business in 2004. The past few years have been a real test of faith for many clients, as they have seen demand fall, competition intensify, and the bottom line get squeezed.

There are challenges that are more specific. One is bonding with the target consumer in this age of media fragmentation. Our clients now have to grapple with nontraditional media such as the Internet, mobile texting,

corporate level. As media fragmentation is accelerating the pressures on brand owners, they can't treat the brand relationship as a one-sided affair anymore. Yet many clients do not even have sound measurement tools for brand health in place. And when they do have metrics in place, they are often incomplete or obsolete.

There are also some industry-specific challenges. "Big Pharma" clients are experiencing sluggish innovation, which leads to ever-greater expectations of those drugs that successfully make it through the regulatory approval process. This need for "blockbusters" has raised the stakes for drug launches, just as me-toos and generics are shortening the product life cycle.



Direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising and enhanced consumer access to disease and treatment information (we are all a Google search away from the good, the bad, and the ugly information) are also changing the way pharma brands are built, as companies are still embracing all the marketing options that are available to their organizations.

Finally, one of the biggest news items has been Americans buying their drugs in Canada, which could obviously have dramatic effects on pricing in the coming years here in the U.S. and internationally, depending on how this issue plays out in the industry and the media. We will all have to wait and see how this story unfolds.

HOW CAN KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS HELP CLIENTS NAVIGATE THESE ISSUES?

By delivering fast, precise consumer knowledge that helps clients get it right the first time or, at the very least, make timely course corrections.

For example, our integrated brand research approach offers a road map to brand owners who want more performance out of their brands. We do a great job of providing guidance on the specific brand levers to pull—for example, key messages, reformulated positionings, or appropriate marketing mix decisions.

We also draw on advanced modeling techniques to deliver actionable segmentation for clients, whether they are launching

a new product or seeking to refocus the marketing for an existing product. We don't just pinpoint the target segments, we also figure out how to penetrate those segments by identifying the best communications vehicles and the most appropriate message parameters. In fact, we have done quite a bit of segmentation and positioning analysis for drug companies evaluating consumer and professional audiences.

Let me provide a great example of textbook partnering with a client facing some serious market opportunities and challenges. We recently helped a large CPG firm figure out how to respond to the low-carb trend that is taking the country by storm. Our work applied some modeling techniques that simulated the effect of various nutritional claims on consumer choice. Instead of simply

serving up a hit list of optimal claims, we knitted the information together to provide context for the client's company-wide response to this trend. This solution required industry insight and an understanding of the categories that went far beyond the core survey data we collected.

SO WHAT'S IN STORE FOR THE NEW YORK CITY OFFICE?

I have been fortunate enough to inherit a great team and we are planning to add even more talent to our team at all levels in 2004 to keep up with the rapid growth in the firm and in our New York region. We have recently appointed a new Vice President to strengthen our senior research advisory capabilities. These new appointments



will also help us groom the next wave of talent in the office, by leading through example and by structuring in-house accelerated learning seminars.

We are also making significant investments in our pharmaceutical research capabilities. Our consumer panel is a gold mine of ailment and lifestyle data, and we now have the senior talent we need to bring the data to life in strategic and tactical studies.

I am also working to connect the dots between the New York City office and Knowledge Networks' other centers of excellence. Our Cranford office is a leader in the field of media research; our Cincinnati office offers great insights into marketing mix decisions using behavioral data; and our Menlo Park office has great expertise with not-for-profits, including advising clinical investigators on design and research methods. We need to bring these assets to bear on our current client relationships in New York City.

AS A NEWCOMER, WHAT DO YOU THINK MAKES KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS DISTINCTIVE?

As professionals, it is imperative that we spend considerable time looking at the world through our clients' eyes. This means familiarizing ourselves with the business decisions facing our clients and getting up to speed on the complexity of the competitive environment; but it also means doing our very best thinking in support of our clients.

This is where I think Knowledge Networks is truly distinctive. Our leadership team brings tremendous integrity and energy to their work. Everyone here is 200 percent

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passionate about creating more successful clients, more so than I have experienced in any other services firm. It is inspiring to be part of this firm.

ANY FINAL THOUGHTS?

I have run the numbers and consulted the experts, and I am confidently predicting that this New Year's Eve in Times Square will be the best ever! Hope to see you there at midnight!

Justin Edge is Knowledge Networks' Senior Vice President and Managing Director, Client Service, and head of the company's New York City practice. He can be reached at jedge@knowledgenetworks.com.