



Free Agent: Marc Babej

## THE NEW AD AGENTS

### Anti-Agency Agent

No creative, no media, just pure thought

Reason Inc. is an advertising agency the way the hit TV series “Seinfeld” was a “show about nothing.” Reason doesn’t create ads, it doesn’t buy media, and it doesn’t even conduct research. All it does is think. Moreover, it only has one employee — founder, president, and sole thinker Marc Babej.

What Reason does have is clients, and some pretty influential ones at that. And while Babej demures when it comes to discussing them, he occasionally lets it slip that he was doing “this thing” for Time Warner and “that thing” for one of the vice presidential candidates. But just try to get him to talk about what those things are.

Most likely they are some fairly strategic marketing projects. Consider the primary services the agency offers: “reason-based strategy,” “motivation engineering,” “marketing contingencies,” and “actionable futurism.”

Babej, a former brand strategy director at big agencies like D’Arcy Masius Benton & Bowles, and smaller shops like Kirschenbaum Bond + Partners, is cutting out the middleware and going straight to the thinking process. Sounds reasonable to us. **JM**

and investors fleeing from all but the most traditional media economics, triggering what proved to be one of the worst recessions ever for the media industry.

By mid-October, *Brill’s Content* had folded, and Brill Media Holdings, a company that once planned to provide media content directly to consumers on-demand and for one-time fees, was on the verge of going out of business.

Within a year, Bob Pittman resigned as COO of AOL Time Warner, and the company dropped AOL from its corporate name. Advertising, once again, ruled mass media economics, albeit in recessionary times.

But somebody forgot to tell media consumers. After getting a taste of what it felt like to access media content on-demand, consumers clearly liked the convenience and control. What’s more, the Internet taught them that most content could be accessed for free, as long as they didn’t mind skipping past banner ads as fast as their content was served.

Tivo taught them to do the same with TV commercials. And the economics of media were beginning to shift in a way that was unimagined by the e-commerce evangelists. Commerce wasn’t king. Neither, apparently was content. The consumer was.

### Consumer-Driven Reality

Fast-forward four years to the summer of 2005 and there are some ironic similarities to the summer of 2001. The Internet is once again booming. Dot-coms are once again some of the fastest growing brands, and online ad spending is surging.

But the fastest growing segment of online advertising isn’t content and it’s not even commerce-related. It’s consumer-driven. It’s called search, and it’s another indication that consumers are in control of