

## Special Report INTERACTIVE AWARDS

# INTERACTIVE AGENCY OF THE YEAR: R/GA

## Shop proves adept at playing off 'creative consumer engagements'

By KRIS OSER

TECHNOLOGY PROS are fond of claiming that if you want to know the future, visit Japan. In the interactive agency world, if you want to know the future of advertising, visit R/GA.

Under CEO, Chief Creative Officer Robert Greenberg, the agency is defining advertising in a customer-centric evolving age.

Consider the 3-D driving game launched recently for Subaru of America using the newest version of Flash software, eliminating the need for most plug-ins. The game, promoting the Impreza, is designed to not only get the consumer involved with the car, but to hold them as long as possible. The user can design the vehicle and select the driver. Top finishers in an online race can compete against others, and a winner will be named at the February Chicago Auto Show.

It's about "creative engagements—not punch lines," Mr. Greenberg says.

The agency's big idea is that while today consumers demand to be in control, their interaction with a brand is not always enacted through the Web or any device in particular. Nor is it about even a series of multimedia hits. R/GA homes in on what kind of relationships the consumer has with a brand. And that interaction is entirely about R/GA's tactical means of building and tending that relationship.

The agency has placed interactivity at the core of its strategy. But Mr. Greenberg is evolving R/GA's strategy across all channels, just as he nurtured R/GA over the last 30 years from a film production company to an interactive agency.

Each account is organized around a team of creatives, data researchers and planners, technical experts and specialists in interaction design.

Unique to R/GA, its leaders say, is that these specialists have a role equal to traditional account executives for each project from the start.

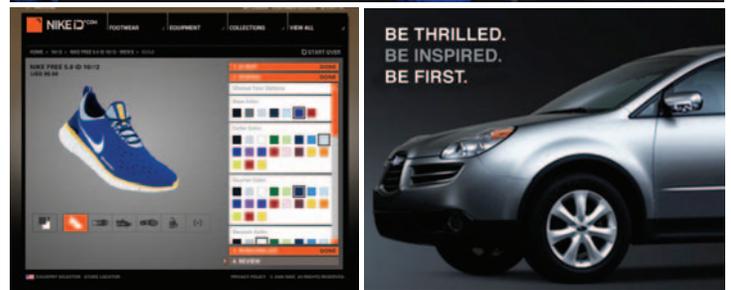
Chris Colborn, VP-in-teraction design, says focus groups, market research and hands-on experimentation about why a consumer would prefer one concept over another are part of each creative execution from the start.

### TECH CORNERSTONE

Technology is a cornerstone at an agency that believes its implementation is critical in engaging consumers. It's "part of the creative process," says John Mayo-Smith, VP-technology. The team of Anne Benvenuto, Director strategy, planning and integration, folds in database marketing and research, and segments customer groups from the start, too.

For Avaya, a telephony services marketer that's increased its interactive marketing budget by 50% this year, R/GA is building a database of information technology leaders. R/GA's online video clips of the target audience talking about how overburdened with gadgets they are "provide the perfect balance between extremely good creativity ... and real facts for my customers," says Jocelyne Atal, chief marketing officer at Avaya.

And it's paid off. R/GA is No. 12 in *Advertising Age's* ranking of interactive agencies, with revenue in 2004 of \$41.6 million, up about 15%. Since 2004, it's hired 200 staffers.



**FINE ONLINE:** From l., R/GA's Chris Colborn, Robert Greenberg, Anne Benvenuto and John Mayo-Smith; and below, agency work for Nike and Subaru.

New-business wins since last year include Lowe's, Johnson & Johnson, Subaru, Lucent and Sharp; the agency played a role in helping Inter-public Group of Cos. siblings Lowe and McCann Erickson Worldwide win Nokia and Intel.

And finally, R/GA has lifted interactivity to a new height for Nike by recreating the Nike iD build-your-own-sneaker application on the 23-story Reuters sign in Times Square. Bystanders customize their sneaker designs using their cellphones.