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Promise Keepers by Alison Garwood-Jones



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Zync, the Toronto-based branding and communication agency, has rebranded everything from multinational corporations to mom-and-pop stores, and why not? Variety is the spice of life.

If Marko Zonta and Brad Breininger, the design and strategic duo heading up the Zync agency, can make our minds race, our palms sweat and our hearts jump, they've done their job as branding and communications experts.

From a bricks-and-beam studio in Toronto's east end, Zonta and Breininger oversee an in-house staff of 12 assigned to strategy, creative, studio, writing and project/account management, plus a constellation of freelancers working on video production and social media monitoring.

Since opening its doors six years ago, Zync has built up a diverse client roster that includes Scotiabank International, SunLife Financial, JVL Mobi (designers of mobile game apps), Ikea and Loblaws, as well as a long list of local clients, ranging from Casey House to the Blue Bamboo Yoga Studio.

"We made a decision early on that we weren't going to specialize in one type of client, like financial services or home furnishings," says Breininger. "As we tell each client, We don't need to be experts in your business, you're the experts."

"But what we do need to be good at," adds Zonta, "is helping them understand what their product is and how they're trying to market it." After all, a brand is a promise, the promise of what your company is going to be. And that's where the racing heart and sweaty palms come in.



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Distilling an organization's message in tough economic times is a challenge when the playing field keeps shifting and companies keep merging to streamline their resources and save money. "In the past two years we've had quite a few clients coming to us looking for a brand refresh or a complete brand overhaul," says Breininger.

Take the National Hardwood Lumber Association (NHLA), based in Memphis, Tennessee. "They told us their business future was about expanding globally," says Breininger. But their logo — a 110-year-old red and black cross motif — was outdated and misleading.

Because the future of this Southern giant depended on change, Zync created a new tagline, "Strong roots. Global reach," and paired it with a simple, clean logo of a leaf (for new growth) anchored by roots in the shape of an H (for tradition). The new tag and logo went on their ads, communications strategy, corporate brochures, website and stationery.

Tough times may concentrate the mind, but so do revolutions. The JVL Corporation, based in Concord, Ont. was another client determined to be at the forefront of the worldwide shift to digital platforms. The company started out as a maker of coin-operated countertop games, such as video poker, for bars and arcades, and swiftly reinvented itself as a leader in mobile game apps for the iPhone and iPad. Zync oversaw their entire social media marketing campaign. "We created a community page, a Twitter and a Facebook page with ongoing contests, and a YouTube channel with ambush-style street interviews with gamers, and we update it all on a daily basis," says Breininger.

It's official, then, the days of the billboard ad and long printed annual report are over. "If you don't adapt, you die," insists Breininger. "The JVL campaign used no traditional media at all," he points out, nor did it require much original design since Twitter and Facebook already have a very specific look and feel.

So where's the fun in that? we ask. "It's still about fulfilling a promise," explains Breininger. "The creativity is in the art of focusing your message, gathering followers, interacting with them and changing based on their feedback."

Yeah, we take a lot of pride in showing companies how to drive their businesses forward," says Zonta.

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