

## Business

### 'Making it' in ad world doesn't mean NYC

LIZ FARMER

Daily Record Business Writer

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If you like crowded city streets, being consumed by your work and an excellent corned beef sandwich, then maybe New York's advertising world is the right fit for you.

But when David Smith, who built a career on Madison Avenue managing accounts like Smirnoff Ice, Frito-Lay and Pepsi before starting his own shop down South, decided to make his next big move, it wasn't back to the city that never sleeps. It was to one of Baltimore's top ad firms, Carton Donofrio Partners, as executive creative director.

"If you're trying to have balance in your life, New York is not the place to be," said Smith, 45, who co-founded The Republik in Durham, N.C., after relocating there with his wife seven years ago to raise their family.

"And conversely," he continued, "I don't think you can do great advertising without balance — you have to be able to translate those everyday experiences into advertising messages."

It's a move that signifies what many in the industry say has been happening for years — with major clients joining up with firms all over the country, "making it" in the advertising business isn't about location any more.

"You've got a lot of good people who are not anchored in New York City," said Robert Passikoff, founder of Brand Keys, an advertising research firm in New York. "Great work is not determined by the longitude and latitude so much as it is the ability to take your creative talent anywhere."

In the Baltimore area, national accounts like Papa Johns Pizza and Texas Instruments have signed with MGH Inc., Planit does work for National Geographic and CitiFinancial, and TBC has landed the Wall Street Journal, Smart Balance and Yellowbook — to name a few.

"The clients, if you're on their radar, they're less concerned about where you're located," said Tom Hollerbach, a partner at TBC who formerly ran worldwide firm BBDO's western offices in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

"The Wall Street Journal has tons of firms to choose from that are literally down the street from them, but they chose to come here," he added.

While New York is still an advertising Mecca in terms of sheer numbers — hundreds of firms employing tens of thousands — to those in the industry, it's not always the end goal.

"Madison Avenue is really more of a state of mind and belongs to 'Mad Men' and that era," said John Patterson, MGH's creative director, referring to AMC's popular television drama about New York ad men in the 1960s.

Patterson, who's won his share of industry awards including the Gold Medal for Copywriting from the New York Festivals, said he wanted to get to New York when he started out more than 20 years ago but found the lifestyle in smaller firms more appealing. Whereas junior executives can get lost in the politics of a large firm and their work may never see the light of day, he said, you can't hide at an 80-person firm in a smaller city.

Hollerbach noted that culture can also affect the client — at a large firm, a top executive may only spend a



small fraction if any of his time on an account. Meanwhile, he said Allan Charles (the “C” in TBC) is hands-on with many of the agency’s top clients.

“That doesn’t happen in New York unless it’s a \$500 million piece of business,” Hollerbach said.

Smith, who worked at New York’s J. Walter Thompson (now JWT), Amiratti & Puris and BBDO, said this week that connectedness with a smaller client and flexibility to try new ideas was part of the reason he wanted to found his own firm.

His boutique firm, The Republik, ran campaigns for clients like Triumph Boats and Fayetteville (N.C.) tourism that garnered international attention for the agency.

“For the past seven years we’ve been able to experiment with some of the smaller companies and our ideas without doing any real damage to anybody because our clients were small,” Smith said, adding, “any attention we did get was going to be to their benefit.”

Hollerbach noted that experience would serve Smith well, as making the jump from a large New York agency to Baltimore can rattle even the most experienced.

“You have to be used to rolling up your sleeves and getting involved and not being 20 steps removed,” he said. “There’s going to be culture shock — you’ve got to be scrappy, you’ve got to be nimble.”

Smith said after he decided this year it was time to join a larger force, going back to the melee of New York with his wife and two kids wasn’t even a consideration.

After all, with a bigger playing field, talent goes where talent is requested.

“I think what [Carton Donofrio’s] got is a talented guy,” said Passikoff, “and if he really wants a good corned beef sandwich, he can take the train up to New York.”