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Neue Digitale/Razorfish

Oliver Lindberg chats to the German agency's CEO, Andreas Gahlert, about snowboarding, corporate takeovers, the Apple SDK and the ongoing Flash vs HTML5 debate

www.neue-digitale.de

Agency location Frankfurt, Berlin

Team 135

Expertise Creative agency for digital marketing, covering strategy, social media, brand experience, user experience, mobile marketing, tools applications, CRM, analytics and optimisation

Established 1996. Neue Digitale/Razorfish has been part of the Razorfish (razorfish.com) network since 2006

Clients Nintendo Europe, SEAT, Audi, Adidas, McDonald's, Microsoft, Olympus, Deutsche Telekom, Linotype, Melitta, eBay, Volkswagen, Daimler, Bildmobil, Gruner & Jahr, Coca Cola, Diesel

Q&A

.net: Tell us a bit about the beginning of the Neue Digitale agency. How did the company come about?

AG: In fact, I started this business by accident. When I was studying to become an engineer, I set up a snowboard travel company. I led this firm for almost 13 years and created its marketing strategy and material myself. This meant that I encountered marketing and digital for the first time and was fascinated by it right from the start. So instead of becoming an engineer, I started work as a multimedia designer at Pixel Factory, one of the first multimedia companies in Germany. After two years as an employee there I decided I'd like to do it independently, so I started Neue Digitale out of my living room. Because of the contacts I'd made when I was running the snowboard business, I had no problem getting clients.

.net: On your website you list no fewer than 10 digital disciplines, but which of these would you say you're best at?

AG: We're definitely best at digital strategy and high-end creative.

.net: Why did you decide to sell Neue Digitale to Razorfish in 2006, after 10 years spent building and nurturing the business?

AG: Neue Digitale was profitable: we were number one in the creative rankings 2005 and 2006. But after 10 years running Neue Digitale successfully, we needed to go to the next level. We had a couple of offers, and Razorfish was a company that impressed us with its high-end digital knowledge and international focus. I'm really glad we created this relationship.

.net: What are the advantages and disadvantages of giving up your independence?

AG: The advantages are bigger accounts and more security. I've stopped worrying all the time and can sleep much better now. Being part of a global network is also a real advantage: we learn a lot from the 2,500 digital professionals working worldwide for Razorfish.

There are disadvantages as well, of course. The bureaucracy is something you have to learn to cope with. Sometimes it takes a lot of time and more than 20 people to get to a decision, but my colleagues and I have got used to it. Having said that, since we've become really successful, we've been given a lot of freedom in the German market, which is great.

.net: What's changing now that Razorfish in turn has been taken over by the global advertising giant Publicis?

AG: Publicis has a great need for digital in the German market, so I'm sure we'll get a lot of new client opportunities as long as we're led by Razorfish in the US. We don't expect big changes in the company's approach.

.net: What's been your proudest moment so far?

AG: The proudest moment in my business life was winning Audi as a new client. I've loved Audi for years, and it took a long time to get them on board as a client. So I'm still emotionally involved and really happy about being able to develop digital work for this outstanding company.

.net: What makes the web design industry in Germany different from the UK and US?

AG: I'd say that on the one hand, Germans are very structured and solid – that's what you'd expect of them. But then on the other hand, emotion, brand and creativity have more impact than in the US. This is a unique combination, and I believe that a German agency is a very good partner for worldwide challenges. The US is definitely more commerce-driven, and the UK lies somewhere in between the two.



Left to right: Olaf Czeschner (chief creative officer), Andreas Gahlert (CEO), Sven Küster (MD) and Sascha Martini (MD)



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"I've stopped worrying and can sleep much better now" **Andreas Gahlert**



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.net: How do you attract your clients? Are they mostly German or – since you're backed by Razorfish – increasingly international?
AG: We win 95 per cent of our clients ourselves – these aren't delivered by the network. Most of them have their headquarters in Germany, but are international players. Our projects often cross borders. I think with Publicis we'll get more network opportunities, since they're in our market.



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.net: Flash seems to be one of your preferred tools. What do you think about the current debate about Flash vs HTML5 and JavaScript?
AG: Flash is something we grew up with. We're well known because of our Adidas and Audi work in Flash. But we know that Flash has a lot of disadvantages and we address this very deeply in our technical strategy. We always do R&D with new technologies in order to be up-to-date and offer the best solutions for our clients. That's why we use Ajax for Audi.de, for example. Because we do a lot of mobile development, R&D into HTML5 is a priority area for us. The Apple SDK is something we're familiar with too, as well as the Microsoft .NET environment.



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.net: What are you currently working on?
AG: The amount of non-digital work is growing and some of the projects are so-called transformation business ideas, which I really like. Alongside this, we're still working on the future model and strategy of our agency.

.net: What's the most bizarre request you've ever had from a client?
AG: One time, after an unpaid pitch presentation, the client asked us if we could send them the PSD files as well. ●

(1) Your Perfect Run (bit.ly/perfectrun) was an Adidas offline and point of sale campaign involving a series of running events across Europe. The online platform encourages runners across the continent to search, find and publish their own perfect run. It enables them to create a multimedia view of their own perfect route and publish this on the Adidas platform and Facebook. (2) McDonald's Stars of America (bit.ly/starsofamerica) was a Google Street View game incorporated in a digital campaign. The McDonald's action products are promoted in an integrated way, ensuring that the interaction possibilities for the user and the entertaining character

of the site remain in the foreground. (3-4) To position the Audi A1 as the first premium compact car, we developed a three-step online campaign entitled Audi A1: The next big thing. We set up official Audi A1 destinations around the social media world, giving the people a home for their conversations about the upcoming Audi A1. The official microsite (audi.com/a1) functioned as a social media hub, centralising all conversations about the concept. It was extended with designer interviews, a style advisor, virtual test drive and a car-customiser. We've since reached the third phase, in which the microsite is the starting point for webisodes with Justin Timberlake. (5) We

were asked to generate attention for an exhibition in Frankfurt called Playing the City. On the site (bit.ly/playingthecity), the City of Frankfurt, its residents and site users were pulled into a secretive game. We also created a YouTube channel, Facebook group and a blog about the exhibit, plus some offline material. (6-7) To increase brand awareness and generate new registrations for Club SEAT at the IAA Frankfurt Motorshow, we developed an interactive augmented reality application (bit.ly/seatar). Promotion codes available at the Club SEAT stand enabled show visitors to project animated, transforming 3D vehicles onto two large terminals and interact with these.