

Introducing Mullen Lowe Group LA + Mediahub



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In April, the California Avocado Commission (CAC) set out to make some changes in our marketing agencies line-up. Our advertising agency of record, DGWB of Santa Ana, CA, kept California avocados on the leading edge for years with the Hand-Grown in California campaign. And our online agency, Red Door Interactive of San Diego, helped us achieve a prominent presence in the digital realm.

But it was time for a change. The demographics of our target consumer are changing, media is being consumed in new ways, and our competition is outspending us five-to-one in the marketplace. Sustainability of the California avocado brand has never been more critical and it could only be secured by becoming smarter, more creative and efficient as possible across all our marketing communications.

On August 20, 2015, we introduced our new agency, Mullen Lowe Group LA + Mediahub, to the Commission board. Mullen Lowe will serve as the Commission's lead marketing agency, integrating advertising and digital capabilities under one roof. Boston-based Mullen Lowe U.S. was founded in 1970 and has a penchant for representing challenger brands or underdogs. With more

than \$1 billion in client billings, they have represented FAGE yogurt, Jet-Blue, Patron, Einstok, Naked Juice, IZZE and a host of other brands. The LA team is a blend of north-eastern dogged determination and Southern California creativity, with a strong dose of brand strategy expertise thrown in. Mediahub brings access to a dazzling array of resources, including the Emerging Media Lab in New York, and unparalleled media savvy. Together, this "hyperbundled" agency, as they like to call themselves, is a powerhouse that stands among the most decorated in the business. And now we have them putting their minds to work on California avocados.

In the intervening months between April and August, a robust screening process unfolded that tapped some of the best agency talent in the United States. Starting from a long list of 26 contenders — and with the help of Select Resources International (SRI), a search firm adept at agency-client matchmaking — Commission management went through a series of steps to narrow the field to four prospective agencies. Representing the Commission throughout the process were Vice President of Marketing Jan DeLyser, Director of Finance and Administra-

tion Monica Arnett, Online Marketing Manager Zac Benedict, and myself. As we neared the finish line, we were joined by CAC Chairman Doug O'Hara of Somis Pacific and Marketing Committee Chairman Bob Lucy of Del Rey Avocado Company.

The process was comprised of a steady stream of interactions with the contending agencies. These included chemistry checks to assess the "fit" between the CAC team and the agency teams, briefings and Q&As, "tissue sessions" where preliminary creative concepts were shared, and final pitches at each agency's shop where integrated campaigns were presented in polished form. SRI then called for compensation proposals from each of the four finalists and conducted detailed comparative analyses against industry standards to prepare the CAC team for contract negotiations. The process culminated with the August 20 announcement at the Commission board meeting.

From the very beginning, Mullen Lowe distinguished themselves as a force to be reckoned with, among a field of extremely talented competitors. Early in the process, all of the agencies were provided with a tremendous amount of information about CAC, the avocado industry and the competitive situation fac-

ing California avocados. The team at Mullen Lowe decided to supplement this information with their own proprietary research, which led them to meticulously dissect and understand our communications target — those people we absolutely have to reach in order for us to sustain a premium position in the market. They also went out and spent the day with northern avocado grower Randy Axell — not a bad thing to do if you are trying to win the California avocado account! The entire CAC selection team realized it was dealing with an agency that was passionate about the avocado assignment, highly creative, and ready to solve our marketing challenge in dynamic, and in some cases, radical new ways.

At the core of Mullen Lowe’s approach to promoting the California avocado brand is a “show and share” strategy that recognizes the impor-

tance of the emotional connection to a product, the human predilection for visual content — wherever it might be encountered — and our willingness to share positive, uplifting ideas and content with others. If that sounds like we are strengthening our presence online — you’re correct. But there’s more to the strategy.

It also involves an increased use of all types of visual media. If that sounds like something that might appeal to millennials, again you are correct. And, again, there’s more. A recent article in *Advertising Age* notes how various psychological studies have shown that “all people — not just millennials — are happier when their money is spent on living, rather than on having,” leading marketers to define “experiential consumers” as those who believe experiences are paramount to enjoyment. Millennials are “proving to be cultural trail-

blazers for older and younger generations,” declares *Advertising Age*. So look around at the visual world, take a deep breath, and prepare to experience some “sticky,” impactful and shareable content from Mullen Lowe when the California avocado brand emerges from its makeover.

At the end of September, Commission staff will host two informal grower barbecues, one at Pine Tree Ranch in Santa Paula and one at the Grand Tradition in Fallbrook, to hear what industry members think about the 2016 crop, the overall state of affairs at CAC and the proposed spending plan for the next fiscal year. We will be joined by several members of the Mullen Lowe team and we invite you to meet them. The immediate future of the California brand rests, in large part, in their exceptionally talented hands. 🥑

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