AdvertisingAge®

Boston Market Taps Zimmerman Advertising as Agency of Record

Restaurant Chain Was Previously With Fallon, but Soon Split After Budget Cuts

By Rupal Parekh

Published: April 01, 2010

NEW YORK (AdAge.com) -- Restaurant chain Boston Market has hired Omnicom Group's Zimmerman Advertising as its new agency of record and the shop will begin work immediately on new TV campaigns and branding efforts, Boston Market CEO Lane Cardwell told Ad Age.

The move comes without a review.

Zimmerman succeeds Publicis Groupe's Fallon, Minneapolis, which was hired to handle creative and media work for the Golden. Co.-based chain starting in 2009, but the two parted ways quietly several months later when Boston Market's advertising budget shrunk.

"Halfway through the year we significantly cut our marketing and advertising budget and went pretty much to an exclusive couponing and discounting strategy," said Mr. Cardwell, who arrived at Boston Market last spring, after Fallon was hired. "I sat down with Chris Foster at Fallon and we talked about how we were really doing a much different strategy than what we brought them on for."

Said Mr. Foster, Fallon's CEO, of the split: "Lane and I decided that there were spending priorities for

the Boston Market business that trumped our planned spending on consumer communication...We at Fallon remain big fans of the brand and want to see them boldly succeed."

Boston Market, known for its rotisserie chicken and homestyle entrees and sides, operates over 500 company-owned restaurants in 28 states. The onetime McDonald's Corp. subsidiary also has a partnership with H.J. Heinz Co., which manufactures a branded line of frozen entrees and jarred gravies. Boston Market-branded products are available in deli departments at more than 1,000 supermarkets nationwide.

The marketer spent close to $30 million in 2008, but according to Kantar Media, that figure dipped to about $4 million in domestic measured media for 2009.

Boston Market's Mr. Cardwell said it was time to pick a new agency after its current owner, Sun Capital Partners, provided it with an infusion of cash to devote to marketing. He declined to provide the exact figure, but said, "We wouldn't bring on an agency like Zimmerman if we were down in the single digit levels; our budget is up this year markedly and we expect next year to increase also."

Zimmerman was hired without a review based on its category experience working with Friendly's restaurants -- another Sun Capital subsidiary -- and with White Castle. The shop will handle both creative and media duties for Boston Market, and its first task will be to shoot a commercial that will tout the chain's forthcoming "Flavor Bar" of different sauces to accompany chicken products that are available in stores as of April 12. The spots are slated to air a week later on April 19.

"We're also looking forward to an expanded line of sandwiches and salads in the first week of June, and we hope to put media behind that too," Mr. Cardwell said, noting it won't be only product launches that Zimmerman works on. "A lot of what they can help with is making sure all our brand elements are in alignment."

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