

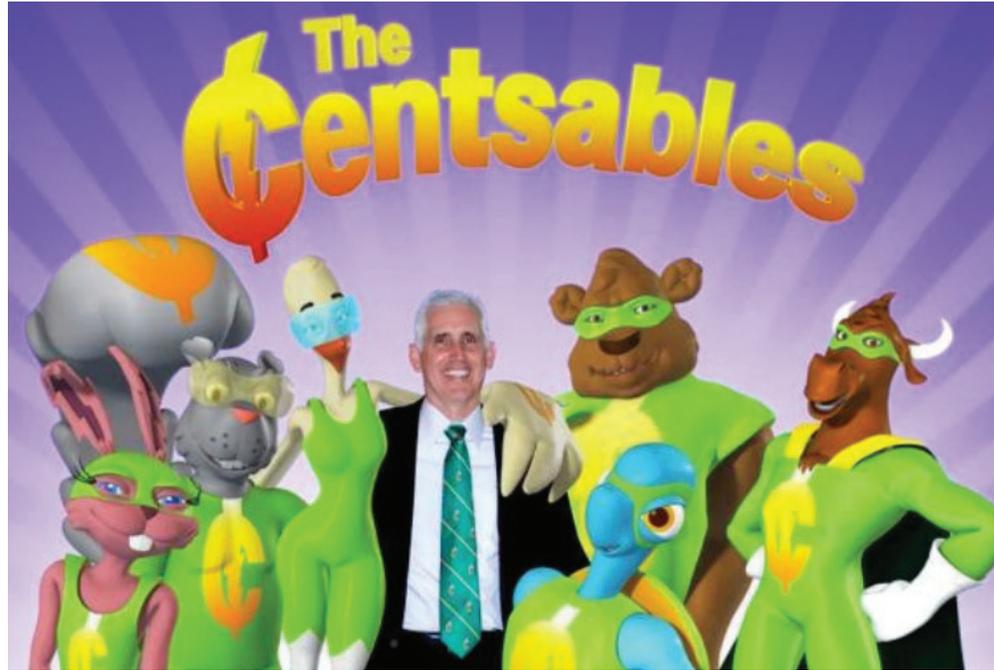
A Marketing Firm Goes Lean—and Wins Big

Mark Dipippa wanted to teach kids about finance, so he leveraged his team to make bankers into superheroes. Meet ‘The Centsables.’

For DNA Creative founder Mark Dipippa, less is almost always more. The Huntington, New York-based advertising veteran has seen his business ebb and flow over the past two decades and, today, finds himself in the enviable position of using past experience to drive his advertising company into the industry’s next phase. At DNA—which handles everything from national multimedia campaigns to email and social marketing—that means a lean staff, a flexible work environment and a balance between traditional marketing and advertising clients and personal passion projects.

Though Dipippa has overseen both large and small staffs over the years, he says his current team of 12 has seen the results of working smarter, not larger, when it comes to employee numbers. He credits their ability to successfully take on an increasing number of projects and clients to, among other things, their familiarity with each other and the business. “My staff has been with me a long time, so it’s a process,” he says, adding that he has readily embraced the idea of a flexible work environment, including work-from-home options. “Everyone knows each other and has spent years working in the same office. The nontraditional setting that I provide is a function of years of loyalty and trust.”

That trust extends into daily duties as well. Dipippa manages to streamline his staff (and his bottom line) by eliminating executive-level account management, instead blending roles by hiring creative talent with the people skills to handle client interaction, much of which, he says, now takes place virtually. Putting trust in his team means they can now oversee anything from daily client communications to presentations via teleconferencing platforms, leaving Dipippa free to connect with both new and longtime clients



DNA Creative founder Mark Dipippa with the Centsables crew.

in a less business-centric space (think golf outings and dinners). “The trust thing doesn’t happen immediately,” he says. “It’s mostly a gut feeling that I get after working with someone.” Dipippa also credits his successful staffing—most of his new hires are art directors—to the advertising industry’s specialized needs. “It can be easier because you’re looking for artistic ability,” he says. “The portfolio can speak for itself.”

Another aspect of the business that Dipippa has streamlined is DNA’s plan for future growth. Though the agency can still rattle off a list of high-profile traditional advertising and marketing clients, eight years ago Dipippa blended his knowledge of finance and entertainment (his first job was working with television clients) to create The Centsables, animated superheroes who teach children about money and personal finance through interactive activities,

an award-winning Centsables television series on Fox Business Network, teacher-focused lesson plans, action figures, trading cards and more.

The program, created entirely by Dipippa and his in-house team of copywriters and designers, is now licensed to more than 32 banks and credit unions who pay a monthly fee for use of the characters (friendly bank employees by day, superheroes by choice), lesson plans and content, which they then use to connect with the local community. Dipippa and his team created a rich, content-heavy website to complement the program, which enables kids to explore monetary concepts and basic economics as well as learn everyday skills such as check writing and budgeting. “The next five years, my focus is on finding that right Centsables partner,” says Dipippa, who enlisted the help of his own children in its creation and marketing. “It’s a mission to get this thing global. That’s what I’d like to do going into my glory days.”

The Centsables multimedia, digital-heavy focus is another way DNA shows its embrace of new, simplified advertising and marketing trends, with Dipippa admitting that the amount of his digital spends has skyrocketed in the past few years. “My clients four years ago spent zero on digital,” he says. “Now we’re at 35 percent in some cases. Print has gone down, TV has stayed the same, but the growth of digital has been incredible.”



Andrea Carneiro Contributor, American Express OPEN

Photo: Courtesy of DNA Creative

MARK DIPIPPA / DNA CREATIVE / MEMBER SINCE 94