



# In the Agency Biz, The times... they are a-changin'

**So, if you're looking for new solutions from old, traditional ad and marketing agencies, good luck. Good thing LaBov & Beyond isn't your typical agency. Or an agency at all, for that matter. What, exactly, is it? Find out.**

Although this isn't exactly what Dylan was referring to when he created his now iconic folk classic, the same message seems to be true when examining the evolving world of advertising and marketing. Bigger is no longer better, and many times more really means less. Although many of the traditional "mega" agencies still dominate the marketing world, there is without a doubt a developing trend toward the more unique and oftentimes smaller agency model. Just like Dylan, these companies have the creative freedom and independence to explore the road less, or maybe even never before, traveled. And, more and more, clients are forgoing the safety and comfort of their large agency partner for a dose of passion, inspiration and reality. The same simple formula that makes a great song has become music to the marketing ears of more and more companies.

## A call for help

"Barry, I just read your little book on customer loyalty and I need your help. How soon can you get up here to see me?" The call for help was coming from Len Hunt, at the time the Executive Vice President of Volkswagen of America. As the highest-ranking VW executive in the United States and Canada, Len was frustrated and concerned over the upcoming launch of its radically redesigned and improved Jetta—the brand's highest volume seller in North America. He had issues and challenges, both externally and internally, to face down and conquer before the launch of the Jetta would hopefully bring about a renaissance for the brand in North America. But, Hunt knew he couldn't do it alone. He knew he needed help.

Hunt turned for help not to his national ad agency or his high-profile consulting firm. Instead, he reached out to LaBov



Barry LaBov

& Beyond Marketing Communications, a 60-employee, long-time supplier of VW's. It's an odd, unique and successful company located in a small Midwestern city, Fort Wayne, Indiana. It's also a company with its own private jet and its



LaBov's Boomerang Book on customer loyalty is just one of the many Umbrella Series stories used by many clients for corporate team building.

own head-shaking niche: LaBov & Beyond works with corporations that sell through channels—such as dealers, distributors or reps. And, LaBov & Beyond is particular in choosing the clients it works with: "We only connect with companies that are hungry and humble for new thinking, for a true partnership," LaBov explains. "No room for egos—theirs or ours."

"We find it fascinating that no matter how great a company's product, service or reputation is, if the very people that represent it don't believe in it or aren't fired up about it—there's trouble," Barry LaBov, the company's founder, president and CEO, says. He continues, "We help clients either address that trouble or avoid it altogether. We help engage everyone in the traditional sales network—from the employees of the corporation to the dealerships that represent the product—to see the value and the beauty of the our clients' brands."

Mike Kennedy, Vice President of Sales for marine-engine manufacturer Evinrude, puts it thusly: "LaBov is so full of energy and they understand business—that rare, special combination makes things fun."

Indeed, LaBov & Beyond has helped engage salespeople, employees and even customers to buy into and engage through campaigns, missions, products and services. From a distance, it's hard to understand how a small business located in the heart of America would be in such heavy demand on both coasts

and throughout the nation. As you delve deeper into the mindset of LaBov and his company, however, a clearer picture emerges.

## Join the band.

An accomplished musician whose songs have been published by Barry Manilow and Natalie Cole and featured on American Bandstand, Barry LaBov loves bringing a rock 'n' roll approach to business: "The best band ever, the Beatles, had a magic about them. They always surprised you; they never played it safe. You didn't know what they would do next, but you knew that it would be inspired. That's how we look at what we do for our clients. We first seek to understand what their situation is—what makes it unique—and we then allow ourselves the complete freedom to come up with ideas that can help them. Sometimes, those ideas surprise even us."

The ideas have ranged from creating a collection of a dozen business parables (like the one Len Hunt read and was inspired by) called the Umbrella Series (now being published in the Korean language) to a cartoon series that promotes the features of a new car to

a three-part movie that sells used cars to creating the launch of a new product around a boxing-match them. The list of unique, dynamic ideas, as they say, goes on and on.

And so does LaBov & Beyond's client list, which includes nationally renowned automakers, aircraft manufacturers, trucking companies, orthopedics firms, heavy equipment manufactures and financial institutions. Its automotive client base alone runs covers the proverbial spectrum of brands, from Suzuki and VW to Audi, Ferrari and Maserati. Then, there's the impressive list of non-automotive clients, which includes Evinrude, Steel Dynamics, Zimmer Orthopedics, Newmar, Terex and Freightliner. LaBov & Beyond is so open about helping its clients that it frequently partners with its larger clients' international ad agencies to "do the things those traditional ad agencies, frankly, don't want to do."

## A crazy culture.

"We have to be honest with ourselves," Cathy Schannen, a vice president at LaBov & Beyond, admits. "We're based in Midwest, we work hard and love to do the kinds of things that have never



One of many internal marketing projects for Volkswagen: a four-story building wrap celebrating the new Jetta.



Ferrari is just one of the major automotive companies that turns to LaBov to launch its new products and train its dealer salespeople.

been done before. Those factors mean we're not going to be a perfect fit for every client or every employee out there. That realization is a big reason why LaBov & Beyond proactively limits its growth to only two new clients a year, instead focusing much of its new-business efforts on growth with existing clients. "Our clients—the ones who have been with us for along time—deserve our best effort every day, and it may be hard for us to give them that if we're chasing every potential new clients that comes along," LaBov explains. "We like to think we have our priorities straight—and we aren't tempted to take just any new prospective client."

Internally, LaBov & Beyond is just as independent. "We love to have happy, engaged employees, but we also realize that some don't want to, or simply can't, perform at the highest level. So, we respectfully allow them to move on."



Traveling for client business is easy with LaBov's corporate jet, with interiors custom-designed by its own creative team.

Named one of Indiana's Best Places to Work for two years running, LaBov & Beyond promotes and encourages its employee culture, and even created its own online Employee Handbook that is so provocative that hundreds of companies seek it out online to "borrow" it. Which, of course, is just fine with LaBov. "I think it's a compliment that so many companies use our handbook—I just hope they believe in its principles like we do." LaBov employee put those principles into action every day, says client Duncan Crook of Audi, and it shows: "LaBov & Beyond's

*"We find it fascinating that no matter how great a company's product, service or reputation is, if the very people that represent it don't believe in it or aren't fired up about it—there's trouble," – Barry LaBov*

employees are so engaged, so inspired—I never have to push them to think or go further."

#### Laugh in the face of convention.

When asked what makes his company the unique and creative agency that it is, he laughs. "I just think we do the right things because they are the right things to do, not just to be creative. If they appear to be creative, that's great." His company has shared profit and ownership with employees for more than a decade—"I wouldn't work anywhere where I didn't

have the chance to share in the success." All employees are able to utilize LaBov & Beyond's jet for business trips to help employees get home to their families for dinner every night if possible: "Lunch with clients, dinner with family," as LaBov succinctly puts it. LaBov's creative staff even designed the exterior and interior of the company's jet, a Citation CJ-1. "It drove Cessna's engineers a little crazy," LaBov says, smiling, "but it meant a lot to our people."

#### Start at the heart.

For example, says Keith Wells, LaBov & Beyond's COO, "We just helped a billion-dollar business merger take place. Funny thing was, because of the highly confidential nature of the deal while it was still in the negotiation stages, we couldn't tell our employees here at LaBov outside of the small core account team—everyone else thought we were planning a holiday party for a client." The project team wasn't planning a party, of course; it was guiding one of the merging corporation's key leadership team to come to grips with the fact that it was being sold to a former competitor. LaBov & Beyond's job was to help the client face "the invisible elephants," the problems they didn't want to discuss, and to change

the negative perception and acceptance of the transaction into a positive one. And they did. Said Wells, "Key to the success was our clients' complete dedication to seeing this succeed; they opened all the doors and were 100-percent honest about everything—no holding back. It really helped us tackle what was necessary."

#### Be happy with who you are.

LaBov & Beyond realized years ago that it wasn't your typical, traditional agency. It's a badge of honor everyone at the agency proudly wears. Ann

Jones, an account service vice president, explains: "We refuse to be defined by the traditional agency model. We train, we motivate, we communicate, we sell, we engage—we do whatever our client needs. We sometimes counsel, too. We help our clients come to grips with and more fully understand who they are—we help them discover that—and then how to capitalize on it." Jack Pelton, CEO, president and chairman of Cessna, affirms Jones' estimation: "LaBov & Beyond identified who we are better than we ever could—they gave me insights that I never dreamed of."

#### Follow the passion.

Says 25-year LaBov & Beyond employee and co-owner, Dick Swary, "Barry and I played music in a band for years and nothing has changed—except we both have a lot less hair (especially Barry)." He continued, smiling, "We have to give 100 percent of ourselves to what we do, because even if the audience (the client) doesn't know it, we will." At the time, Swary was speaking from an event that he was overseeing helping an international heavy-duty equipment manufacturer breakthrough with its dealers.

#### A call for help is answered.


So, what did happen after Len Hunt, the VP from Volkswagen, reached out to Barry



Wabash Valley turned to LaBov to reinvent its high-line luxury outdoor furniture line. The "furniture as art" approach included a new brand name, Urbanscape.

LaBov? First of all, LaBov & Beyond helped Hunt and his team engage the 1,000-plus employees at Volkswagen of America on

its critical new Jetta launch, then set out to do the impossible—travel to hundreds of dealers to first train them on, and then to assist them in, pre-selling the revamped Jetta. Thousands of test drives and hundreds of sales later, the entire project was deemed a success. LaBov delivered. And, memorably, so did Len Hunt, with one of LaBov & Beyond's all-time favorite quotes: "Working with LaBov was insanely successful."

The moral of this unfinished story? As large corporations continue struggling to find a new, different or better way to address a business challenge while singing the same old marketing song, it might make sense to break with convention. 



The launch of the Suzuki XL7 included a unique approach – all events were held in movie theatres and included original animated feature clips to position the vehicle. They even threw in the popcorn.