

[Close Window](#)



Agency Profile: Digital Kitchen

Creative Head discusses firm's evolution into transmedia

Sep 28, 2011 17:15

Digital Kitchen may be known most for helping to elevate television opening sequences into a new art form, based on its innovative work for programs like “Six Feet Under” and “Dexter,” but don’t typecast the firm into this niche.

Like actor Michael C. Hall, who was also nominated for an Emmy in 2002 for his work on “Six Feet Under”, Digital Kitchen has evolved. It wasn’t enough to stick with main title sequences, even though the firm is the most Emmy nominated agency in that category.

About 10 years later, Hall has multiple Emmy nods for his portrayal of America’s favorite serial killer Dexter Morgan on Showtime’s hit show “Dexter”, and Digital Kitchen has become one of the world’s first transmedia agencies.

DailyVista caught up with Head of Creative Jeff Long who discussed the agency’s evolution and what Digital Kitchen has been cooking up lately.

DailyVista: First off, Dexter is my favorite show, and I love the opening sequence. Could you provide some background on how Digital Kitchen got involved with Dexter and into TV title sequences in general?

Jeff Long: We love “Dexter” too. The opportunity to create “Dexter’s” opening sequence came from the success of “Six Feet Under”. We view all of our main title work as little art films that prepare the viewer for the journey that follows. It is an honor to be recognized for breathing new life into TV title sequences and elevating them as a legitimate art form.

DailyVista: While Digital Kitchen is the most Emmy nominated agency in this category, is it still a challenge for the agency to set itself apart from the other competitors in this new art form? How does Digital Kitchen gear its strategy to continually be cutting edge, particularly in creating innovative opening sequences?

Jeff Long: Our title sequence and motion graphics work are a big part of Digital Kitchen's heritage. We consider ourselves one of the first hybrid production/creative agencies, which is now the structure that many agencies and production companies are trying to emulate. We have evolved our business over the past 10 years from one of the most respected motion graphics/production houses in the business into an award winning, multi-disciplined, creative agency.

Currently we do not view the title business as a growth area for Digital Kitchen. The storytelling and filmmaking ability to craft innovative title sequences remains one of our core competencies but the opportunities to create more diverse and interconnected content in the current media environment is what really excites us. In that world you're either cutting edge or out of business. We love that kind of challenge.

DailyVista: Digital Kitchen's expertise goes beyond opening sequences, so could you highlight the overall services that the agency offers? Besides opening sequences, what really makes Digital Kitchen stand out among other creative firms?

Jeff Long: Digital Kitchen has evolved into a transmedia agency. We are not tied to a specific media perspective or portal. A culture of innovation is necessary to keep DK and our clients relevant in the age of convergence media. Traditional touch points don't really exist anymore. Most have evolved technologically and the consumer mindset that interprets their messages is radically different. We view all media as new media.

We offer integrated creative work across the 360-degree spectrum via a transmedia perspective. Specifically, brands and entertainment companies choose us for strategic and conceptual thinking, content creation, experience design, interactive, branded entertainment and transmedia storytelling. Our problem solving process is part think tank, part studio, part lab, part sitcom writing room, part Ultimate Fighting Championship, and part plaid-shirted orgy.

DailyVista: Could you provide some background on Digital Kitchen, included how it got started and its major achievements up to this point?

Jeff Long: Digital Kitchen formed in 1995. The main title for HBO's hit series "Six Feet Under" was the first project that put DK on a national stage. Overnight we became a combined live action and motion graphics company – something that didn't really exist at that time.

We helped AT&T launch [U-verse](#). We've worked with them to grow the service to more than 3.5 million subscribers and produced hours upon hours of original content.

For HBO's "True Blood," we created the first fake target market by creating a world where brands such as Mini Cooper, Gillette, and Geico advertised to vampires. Humans in the country's largest

markets walked by convertible Mini Cooper billboards that read, “Feel the wind in your fangs”. The campaign generated news and buzz.

We recently won the [Grand Prix Design Lion at Cannes](#) for our experiential work on The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas, invented the world’s first [interactive movie poster](#) for Paramount Pictures’ “Transformers: Dark of the Moon”, and garnered international acclaim for a site we designed, built, and filled with original content for the [Atlantic Lottery](#).

Overall our major achievement is becoming world-class problem solvers in multiple media categories. This allows us to walk the walk in transmedia marketing as a best-solution, media agnostic agency.

DailyVista: What are Digital Kitchen’s short- and long-term goals for continuing its success? Does this include adding any new staff offices – maybe in the Northeast – or expanding capabilities in any way?

Jeff Long: Our short-term and long-term goals can be summed up in three simple words: evolve or die. We owe this to our clients and ourselves. We will continue to expand capabilities and expertise because those needs change along with culture and technology.

The evolution of technology and our business model makes us less interested in opening additional offices. We will continue to add talented people and grow but more brick and mortar feels like a Blockbuster/Borders proposition right now. The caveat here is opening an office to service a sizeable, location-dependent AOR account.

DailyVista: Along these lines, why was it so important from a growth standpoint for Digital Kitchen to [add](#) a communications role, Shannon Babcock as new business director, and Tina Roth as director of creative recruiting back in May?

Jeff Long: For most of our history, our work has spoken for itself and led us from one great project to the next. But our rapid success in the transmedia space has made our story relevant to a new set of perspective clients, and artists. We decided to bring in outside expertise to more quickly evolve our approach to business development and the recruiting process.

DailyVista: I’ve also read that Digital Kitchen’s business development, communications and recruiting functions all report directly to creative leadership, which I find really interesting. Why does the agency take this approach, and how does this help set Digital Kitchen further apart from its competition?

Jeff Long: The Digital Kitchen story is a creative story. That’s why people hire us. When we add senior staff and new competencies it’s important to us that our story does not get diluted internally or externally. DK’s culture of creativity and innovation is sacrosanct.

Across-the-board creative leadership ensures that our external facing roles really grasp and exemplify our culture. Creative leadership has a big role in helping to say, “Yes this feels like DK”

or not.

DailyVista: Who are some of Digital Kitchen's biggest clients? Can you describe some of the greatest successes the agency has had in really pushing the needle for these clients?

Jeff Long: Today, we serve top brands such as Microsoft, AT&T, The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas and have built innovative case studies for clients including HBO, BMW, Target, Nike, Levi's and A&E.

The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas came to DK for help in positioning itself as a luxury destination, disrupting the status quo, and delivering an unexpected experience. Working closely with the client, we helped them transform the entire resort into a curated art gallery – from the marquee, to the casino, to the elevators. Our work has received critical acclamation and some of the industry's top awards, including the Cannes Grand Prix Design Lion.

We have been working with AT&T's U-verse IPTV network since 2006. It is one of most ambitious multi-platform entertainment networks ever created. As an integral partner, we develop the format and programming for U-verse's video on demand offerings through four unique "buzz" channels. Each U-verse channel contains hours of original award winning programming each month. Today, more than 3.5 million subscribers experience AT&T and U-verse as a premier entertainment destination, a key differentiator for AT&T from the competition.

We recently completed an integrated interactive hub for The Atlantic Lottery Corporation at [AskAway.Ca](#). The hub is a place for Atlantic Canadians to ask anything they want about the lottery. Using a cinematic experience, this digital "quilt" of interconnected stories and questions allows citizens to explore stories, find answers, participate in discussions, and learn how the lottery gives back to the communities it serves. The site was awarded "Site of the Day" by the [Favourite Website Awards](#) this month.

DailyVista: Has Digital Kitchen had any recent wins that you would like to highlight? How did Digital Agency set itself apart from the competition during its approach and/or the review process to win the business?

Jeff Long: We're working on a new campaign for a television network and a high profile consumer contest – but I can't mention these clients by name yet. The work is launching this fall. We are putting the finishing touches on some beautiful new work for The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas. We are also working on a full-blown transmedia experience in the publishing arena.

One of our greatest assets is our ability to visualize and bring complex projects to life in a pitch. We have a semi-raucous internal ideating process that pushes everyone to break new ground. Most importantly, we make our own ideas. That puts a lot of pressure on us to get it right. No one wants to sell, produce, direct, animate, design, and build engines for a project that doesn't excite the client and DK.

DailyVista: In addition to its Emmy's, what other awards has Digital Kitchen won for its work, and

for what clients? How exciting was it to be named in iMedia 25 Agencies to Watch list in July?

Jeff Long: We're always honored to have our work recognized by our peers, especially for integrated campaigns. As I mentioned, this year our work for The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas has been recognized with Grand Prix Design Lion at Cannes and a Gold Design Pencil at the One Show. Last year, our work for HBO's "True Blood" Season Two marketing campaign was awarded an Effie, a Webby and IAB Mixx's Campaign of the Year.

Just this week we were recognized by the Favourite Website Awards for our [mobile work](#) with Paramount Pictures.

DailyVista: Are there particular industries where Digital Kitchen likes to focus its attention, or is its expertise across the board?

Jeff Long: We love passion brands and obviously like working with the entertainment industry. The publishing industry and the conversion of printed content into transmedia experiences is an exciting frontier.

Opportunities in experiential media continue to surface for us since our work on The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas resort. We love solving problems that utilize our cross-category expertise to tell stories for clients. We love discovering media solutions that push communications to new heights of engagement.

DailyVista: What types of clients are the best fit for Digital Kitchen? What are some of the main criteria that Digital Kitchen considers before choosing whether to work with a brand or not? Does this include a preference towards utilizing film-making?

Jeff Long: The best clients for us are really passionate about their brands and embrace the possibilities the ongoing media revolution has to offer. Clients who believe their brand has a great story to tell. Clients who have problems to solve that don't fit typical agency models or want a new perspective on traditional and digital projects.

Filmmaking is a powerful storytelling tool in our transmedia arsenal but our artists have also created comic books, music videos, interactive movie posters, animated shorts, and handcrafted wooden birdcages.

Digital Kitchen

Chicago

314 W Superior St.
Suite 601
Chicago, IL 60654
(312) 944-3999

Los Angeles

8695 Washington Blvd.

Suite 206
Los Angeles, CA 90232
(310) 499-9255

Seattle

1114 East Pike St.
Third Floor
Seattle, WA 98122
(206) 267-0400

Mark Bashore

Head, Creative
mbashone@thisisd.com

Jeff Long

Head, Creative
jlong@thisisd.com

Shannon Babcock

New Business Director
sbabcock@thisisd.com

© 2011 List Partners, Inc. All Rights Reserved