



Sattler in Driver's Seat at Initiative

Feb 27, 2008 • [Post A Comment](#)

Fred Sattler says he's more than a car guy from Detroit. Maybe he should be looked at as a hybrid.

Mr. Sattler joined Initiative this month as executive VP and managing director, after helping the agency win the Hyundai-Kia account. And while he's worked on all three domestic automaker accounts, plus Nissan, he's also worked on Levi's Jeans and the launch of the Sony PlayStation.

"I grew up in Detroit, so we try to get out of the way of being a car guy," he said. "I don't come out of a pure, pure car background, but I certainly have worked on a lot of car brands." Of course, there's an upside to working on car accounts.

"You have the opportunity to help market one of the most significant purchases that a consumer makes in their life of an advertised good," Mr. Sattler said. There are both rational and emotional parts of buying a car, and "you're given budgets that allow you to really create a true multimedia program and campaign to affect opinion change."

On the other hand, he said, it's easy to be trapped by conventional wisdom in the car business.

"We need to be careful that we don't get too wed to them and challenge them with regularity," he said. "If there's one thing that comes with being a car guy, it's not becoming married to these conventional wisdoms, but try things differently. And as the media landscape changes, you need to act more quickly."

Mr. Sattler has been staffing up to handle Hyundai.

"Since the win, I've been coming out [to Los Angeles] to do some interviews and staffing and basically get things set up to deal with the transition items," he said. "It takes a lot of interviewing, a lot of hand-shaking. I think I've shaken as many hands as Hillary and Barack have."

The agency is hiring a couple of dozen staffers, in addition to bringing existing resources to the account. And while the agency is hiring some people with automotive experience, it's also

looking for those with other backgrounds.

"We're really trying to mix up the experience base," Mr. Sattler said. "One of the things that we want to give our client is some fresh approaches to automotive, so we're talking to people in entertainment media and technology and varied backgrounds and assembling some people who do have traditional car experience, but we're trying to take a fresh approach."

At the same time, the media skill set has changed.

"Media is not just about commodities anymore—it's really about marketing. Digital has been talked about a lot, but that's a very important part of what we do," he said. "And also understanding how we can drive word of mouth and do more than just market but influence, so it is a wider [skill] set that we're looking for candidates to have."

Earlier this month, Hyundai ran Super Bowl ads heralding the Genesis, a near-luxury model that will be introduced later this year. Moving a company once known for cheap if reliable transportation into the luxury sphere means the automaker will be trying to reach new customers in different ways.

"They're definitely going to be appearing in new places with this vehicle, hopefully expanding and elevating the image of the brand," Mr. Sattler said. "One of the things with Hyundai is that we need to let consumers know that we have a high-quality product that has refinement in its style, design and accoutrements, and this vehicle will do that."

Growing up in Detroit, Mr. Sattler said he really wanted to play in a jazz trio in Europe, riding around on a Vespa with his drum kit on the back. He was a good enough drummer to make all-state in high school, but pragmatism took over.

He went to business school at the University of Michigan, where, instead of going into the business side of the music industry, he got a job with an ad agency. The agency was Campbell-Ewald, which handled Chevrolet, and he became a media research analyst. From there, he moved to Detroit rock station WRIF as research director, doing focus groups on on-air personalities and breaking down the quarterly Arbitron ratings books.

It was a cool job for someone in his 20s, but it got old fast, Mr. Sattler said. "I think that I had done every radio audience analysis that was possible in my three years there," he said. Getting back into the agency business "was an opportunity to get back into a multimedia environment."

Mr. Sattler went to BBDO, which had the Dodge account, and then to J. Walter Thompson, Ford's agency. Then he got a call from Chiat/Day, wondering if he would be interested in moving to Los Angeles if the agency won the Nissan account. It won the account, and Mr. Sattler was westward bound.

At Chiat, he worked with account planners and evolved from a research guy to a strategist. After a brief entrepreneurial fling with some other Chiat staffers who formed the Leap Partnership, he returned to Chiat in San Francisco to work on the Levi's business.

In San Francisco, Mr. Sattler got to experience the great dot-com bubble at close range. He wrote the media plan for Pets.com, "which was probably the poster child for excess of that

era," he said. He helped put the Internet startup's ad on the Super Bowl, and still has one of the company's sock-puppet mascots on his desk to remind him of those heady times.

After that he went back to Detroit to work at Doner, which had the Mazda account, and PHD, which handles Chrysler. When PHD reorganized, moving its center of gravity to New York, the opportunity with Initiative surfaced.

Working on the Hyundai pitch, he got to know Initiative's management well.

"There's no better way to get to know a bunch of people than to work through that kind of intense crucible and come out the other side feeling all the better about the organization," he said.

In his spare time, Mr. Sattler helps his 8-year-old son with his hitting and throwing and recently took his 5-year-old daughter to a father-daughter dance in Detroit.

Mr. Sattler will be based in Los Angeles, where his wife is from, "so it's a bit of a homecoming for her," he said.

He still takes in a jazz show now and then, and likes to cook.

He also loves to watch television. His favorite shows couldn't be more different: "Family Guy" and "Frontline."

Who knew?: Mr. Sattler proposed to his wife at a surprise birthday party she arranged for him in a dive bar in New Orleans. She arranged a getaway weekend, and when they arrived at the Saturn Bar, there were 60 people there to celebrate. "It was the weekend I was going to propose to her, so I pulled it forward," he said, asking her to marry him with a beer in his hand and a fez on his head. The Saturn Bar survived Hurricane Katrina and they returned a year ago. "I have a photograph of the Saturn Bar over my bar at home now," he said.
