It was one of the most talked-about deals of the decade: Last April, multibillion-dollar consultancy Accenture Interactive acquired Droga5, the agency that Ad Age had just named the industry’s most creative.

Skeptics questioned the ability of homegrown shops to thrive under the umbrella of large consultancies, while others wondered about the “threat” that stereotypically non-creative consultants posed to agency creatives.

A year later, Accenture Interactive CEO Brian Whipple believes those questions can be put to rest with what he calls a “final end to the tired conversation about agencies versus consultancies, and technology versus creativity.”

Having helmed Accenture Interactive since its creation 10 years ago, Whipple makes it clear that the day-to-day operations of the company bear little resemblance to a traditional consultancy. “You’ll see guys soldering circuit boards in a make shop, and ideating about ad campaigns, and all these e-commerce systems and personalized, programmatic media”—and it is that environment in which newly acquired Droga5 has thrived over the past 12 months, he says.

Whipple first worked with David Droga, the founder of his namesake agency, five years ago on a large-scale pitch for the U.S. Census. Although a deal was not in the cards at the time, the two stayed in touch and developed an increasingly cordial professional relationship.

“David is a very hands-on guy, and while he’s the leader of Droga5, he is also a personal and creative driver of their product,” says Whipple, acknowledging that some clients who now retain Accenture Interactive’s services do so with direct access to Droga in mind. “He’s what I’d call a magnet for top talent, and top talent wants to work with top talent.”

Native Australian Droga founded Droga5 in the U.S. in 2006, growing it from an independent hotshop to a 600-employee-strong agency with a high-profile track record and offices in New York and London. Prior to its acquisition, the agency by Ad Age for four consecutive years.

In 2019, he led Accenture’s consulting behemoth through a total of seven acquisitions—including Droga5, its largest—scooping up Spanish agency Shackleton; social media outfit Adaptly; and Latin American design firm INSITUM (recently renamed Fjord), among others. And under Whipple’s leadership, last year also saw the fast-growing agency group build out its roster with new clients including Infiniti, Kimberly-Clark, Nestlé and the Louvre Museum.

As Accenture Interactive CEO, Whipple oversees a company that reported more than $10 billion in annual revenue recently and has been named the world’s largest digital agency by Ad Age for four consecutive years.

Whipple has long advocated for the “Experience Agency” model that blends elements of a traditional business consultancy, cutting-edge creative shop and technological powerhouse, outspokenly leading Accenture Interactive with that same emphasis on experiential creative.

Internet-age brands including Airbnb, Spotify and Uber, for example, made a name for themselves and have found success because of how people experience their brands, not because of TV commercials, Whipple says.

“We have catapulted our growth based on this notion that brands are built on reinventing experiences, and [we put that philosophy] on the map.”

By Ethan Jakob Craft

Agency Executive of the Year

By Ethan Jakob Craft

2020 A-List & Creativity Awards

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