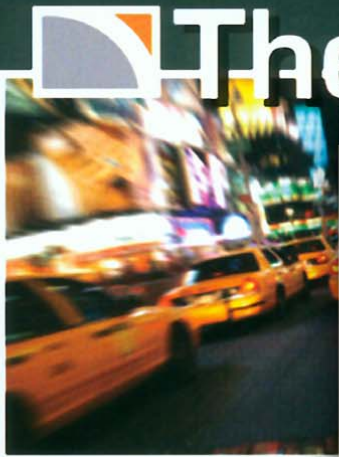


# The Holmes Report



## PR Agency Report Card 2008



### Taylor

BRAND BUILDING AND LIFESTYLE PR  
WITH STRONG SPORTS CAPABILITIES  
New York, Charlotte, Los Angeles

No firm has ever repeated its success in the Midsize Agency of the Year category, but Taylor not only earned that unique



accomplishment after a second consecutive year of delivering against a demanding business plan and redefining itself as a strategic

brand communications firm, it went one better and picked up our U.S. Agency of the Year award. The numbers underlying that recognition are impressive—in 2004, the firm had \$8.4 million in fees and 70-plus accounts; today it has more than \$20 million in fees and just 25 clients—but the numbers tell only a small part of the story. The big difference is that Taylor has been transformed from an old-fashioned publicity shop into what looks a lot like the agency of the future: 20 percent of its fees come from strategic counsel, and the fact that it bills almost \$1 million a client has allowed it to invest in a knowledge center that means it can provide research and insight that allows it to drive brand strategy, not just publicity.

When Taylor (then Alan Taylor Communications) was acquired from its founder by a team of six senior executives two and a half years ago, new chief executive Tony Signore outlined an ambitious strategy to expand its reputation beyond the sports marketing niche where it had made its name and establish it as a strategic marketing partner to a roster of category leader, blue-chip brands. In many ways, Taylor looked like a poor candidate for such a transformation. To outsiders, the firm could easily have been mistaken for a boy's club of old school media relations guys who knew

the sports world but were not exactly on the cutting edge of modern brand building. Anyone who made such a judgment then must be feeling pretty silly now. Signore and his team have not only delivered against that strategy, they have established Taylor as an industry leader in both intellectual property and performance.

Last year saw a significant refinement of the firm's strategic approach, which involves sitting down with each client at what the firm calls a "kick-start" meeting and together establishing what success—not just marketing communications success, but business success—looks like. The process that continues through two stages of research, designed to provide insight into both the communications landscape and the target audience. To assist with the research, the firm has established the Taylor Knowledge Center, which now employs a team of six research professionals with experience at Yankelovich, Harris Interactive, Wirthlin, JWT and other leading ad agencies. Those insights drive the development of communications strategy and creative ideation and eventually a communications plan. Clients who don't see the value of the process are unlikely to remain on the firm's roster for long. (Several clients who did want a more nuts-and-bolts approach were spun-off into a new independent firm, Catalyst.)

Fortunately, plenty do. The firm's biggest clients are blue-chip brands such as Diageo, MasterCard, Alltel, Microsoft, and Allstate; others include Coca-Cola, Kleenex, Bombardier, Hyatt Resorts, Staples, Callaway Golf, and ING. Fee income in 2007 was up by about 10 percent to \$20.1 million and the firm now employs about 115 people across five offices.

In the process, Taylor has expanded both geographically and in terms of its service offer. It has close to 30 people in a Charlotte office that started doing NASCAR related work but has since expanded considerably, about 10 in Los Angeles, and smaller teams

in newer offices in Chicago and London. In addition to its traditional sports and sponsorship expertise, the firm has developed capabilities in Hispanic and multicultural marketing (through a unit called PRimero); digital and emerging media (Coca-Cola Zero was a major client last year); international programming (it handles European assignments for Gillette and Diageo); lifestyle public relations (which surpassed sports in terms of fees in 2007); and entertainment.

"Taylor takes such a strategic approach to our business that sometimes it feels like they're way ahead of us," says the director of sponsorship, promotions and public relations for one of the firm's clients. "Their consumer insight and analysis has led to new and engaging ideas that resonate with our target consumer." Adds a senior brand manager from a major consumer products company: "We thought we knew our target consumer but you have presented insight through your in-depth research and analysis that our current agency and internal research team have never uncovered. To then use that insight to develop a big overarching creative idea that offers a solution to our business challenge is a powerful testament to your approach."

The firm also invested significant time and energy in improving the cultural environment in 2007, working with management consultant Darryl Salerno to incorporate Leader's Edge and Second Quadrant training programs; developing a new internal communications structure; and conducting an agency-wide audit that underscored the need for greater collaboration. To that end, perhaps the most significant move of the year was the relocation to new space in the Empire State Building—including a library, a production room and a recreation room—which provides a state-of-the-art environment for the firm's future growth.