Maxus North America recently ran a campaign designed to attract new customers for a financial services client. Then the account team took all the data; “disaggregated” it, line by line; and worked up a whole new target profile based on which consumers actually converted and became customers.

Maxus North America CEO Louis Jones calls it “reverse engineering”: taking real data and using it to more precisely target media, rather than simply making assumptions about consumers.

“It is right in the nexus of where we need to be—and that’s data at work, helping us make better decisions,” Mr. Jones says.

The intersection of media and technology has proved a sweet spot for Maxus, the youngest media agency of GroupM, which has used its tech expertise, entrepreneurial structure and the support of its parent to become the world’s fastest-growing media agency over the past three years. Since establishing the Maxus global network five years ago, the agency now serves about 400 clients worldwide and has zoomed to $6.9 billion in global billings, according to RECMA.

Maxus employs more than 1,750 people in 55 countries. The newest of the agency’s 70 offices are in South Africa and Belgium, both opened this year, plus France, Argentina and India—where the fifth Maxus location in that country opened last year in Thrissur.

In the U.S., Ad Age named Maxus the 14th largest media agency in 2012, up from No. 18 the previous year, based on an 85 percent increase in estimated U.S. revenues.

Maxus operates what it calls a “global network of local agencies,” which Global CEO Vikram Sakhuja, based in India, explains this way:

“I, and I think most clients, believe that media strategy needs to be driven locally. At the same time, it makes eminent sense to have commonality in processes, tools and best practices,” he says. “We have global leaders in marketing, new business, planning, tools, technology, effectiveness, trading and talent whose job it is to drive best practices and from time to time work alongside markets on their local issues. On global accounts we have leads who coordinate sharing and reporting.”

Maxus’ global network has allowed it to continue growing with current clients; recently the agency has extended its relationships with Fiat into Russia, L’Oréal in Vietnam, GSK in Australia and Barclays in South Africa.

Recent new clients include Harvard Business School (U.S.), Little Caesar’s Pizza (Canada), Telecom Italia (Italy) and Associated British Foods and Arcadia (U.K.).

The core of Maxus’ approach is a planning philosophy it calls “Relationship Media,” which joins media planning and customer relationship management in a new offering backed by real-time data. Mr. Sakhuja says relationship media “integrates tools and technology … to present solutions to multiple problems that clients face in a simple, elegant and often creative way.”

“Maxus followed a clear strategy of building a modern, nimble team. With Maxus, clients get a smaller and more nimble team of experts who can talk about their business,” Mr. Amies says. “Understanding the consumer is absolutely critical and directs what we do. That seems obvious, but you would be surprised at how many people don’t focus on that,” he says. “Our approach is to look at why people buy a brand and what communications can do to influence that. We are in a place today where we can deliver the right message to the right consumer at the right time—let’s use the data to make sure we really have got it right.”

Messrs. Jones and Amies are based in New York, where Maxus staffs all work on one floor without offices. The agency promises clients senior-level attention and highly personalized service that are typically found at much smaller shops.

“We have focused on being flexible, agile and less siloed,” Mr. Amies says. “That culture is strong and comes from our senior management team. With Maxus, clients get a smaller and more nimble team of experts who can talk about their business.” Maxus offers clients communications strategy, digital marketing, performance-based media and data management, in addition to media buying and planning.

“Maxus followed a clear strategy of building a modern, nimble and personalized agency model, powered by GroupM’s media buying scale, technology investments and specialized services,” says Kelly Clark, who served as Maxus’ original CEO until he was named CEO of GroupM’s North American operations last year. “It’s been a winning combination.”
Q&A with Louis Jones

Louis Jones, the CEO of Maxus’ North American operations, has spent a career in digital and social media, and has been leading the agency’s efforts in the U.S. since 2009. Mr. Jones spoke recently with writer Julie Liesse about the agency’s growth and philosophy, and his perspective on the role of a media agency today.

Advertising Age: Maxus, relatively speaking, is a younger media services agency—as you say, “born in the digital age.” How has that influenced the agency’s development and how you work for your clients?

Louis Jones: We are steeped in data. We talk about “digital-centricity”: How the digital streams lead you to a point of making a decision. We look at all the sources of information that help us really understand how a client’s business is behaving in the marketplace and use that data to be smart, be progressive, be forward-thinking, to lean into change and help clients move their businesses based on things that we find out, generally in the insight or performance area.

Ad Age: I think everyone would agree that in the era of Big Data, clients in particular feel overwhelmed by all the information that’s out there. How can an agency help a client make sense of all that data—figure out whom to target and how to target them?

Mr. Jones: First off I’ll say that Big Data is a huge misnomer—it’s all little data. If you actually look at it line by line, it’s little data, right? But once you add it up, it begins to tell you things about your business. In the last year and a half we’ve become really good at deploying a platform we have here called LIVE. It allows us to look at the concomitance of all the client’s activity across paid media, social media, the earned aspects of that social media. When clients give us actual data—sales data—that allows us then to take the next step and begin to do all kinds of analyses, either observed or empirical, to get us to a point of view when a client has a question about what direction their business is going in.

For example, for one of our clients we’ve seen how an ad in the Super Bowl has had two divergent responses—one magnanimous and one really small. However, in the success of the products, the story was in the reverse. So many times you go along assuming that a spot placed in a high-profile place will earn you in-kind preference and likeability. We’ve seen actual observational cases where that is not the case.

Ad Age: How has the job of a media agency changed in the past five or 10 years? Now that we have completely different kinds of media, we have completely different and richer kinds of data, how has that really changed what a media agency does for a client?

Mr. Jones: Fundamentally what it does is change the role the media agency actually plays in the communications value chain. Back 10 years ago, the media-buying industry grew up on this idea of clout. Now it’s access to information and capabilities that really sets any one agency apart from the next. That said, I think where the industry is headed is trying to understand, against all the different options that exist out there for all the different target places, how do we make maps instead of media plans that arc a conversation with a consumer or a customer in a way that we see as the most highly beneficial.

Ad Age: Maps?

Mr. Jones: In the paid, owned and earned context, there is the potential to build a view that says, “This is the experience we would like the customer or consumer to have.” And then we should be working with the client and the creative agency to make sure that all of the right assets exist in order to construct the conversation in the way that the brand wants to have that conversation with consumers and customers. Then our job is really to use the media to effectively drive engagement across those different assets. Hence, my reference to the map—because when that happens, then we’re connecting customers and consumers with the content that really matters to them. Given the digital technologies and the measurability, we can begin to understand how many people are touching the assets, for how long, in what sequence—all kinds of different parameters that can help us estimate who they are, what value they may have to the brand franchise and what message these consumers may need next.

Ad Age: There’s no question that media agencies have assumed a significantly more important role in how client dollars are spent. It’s hard to tell sometimes where the creative and the media begin and end. Do you see that continuing more down the road?

Mr. Jones: Media agencies are going to continue to play a bigger and bigger role in the client’s marketing mix. But I’ve been pretty explicit around here that this is not creative, like creative agency creative. It is more akin to content. But I think it’s a space where we’re all struggling to make sure that the client has the right kind of attractiveness within the communications context. If the creative agencies are focusing still on a 30-second TV commercial and the flat print ad context, there’s so much more room to engage consumers. And if we’re acting as that GPS mechanism, we want to make sure that when you, the consumer, get to that corner, that there’s something on that stop sign that attracts your attention and draws you deeper into the conversation.

We have this mantra around here called PACE. It stands for passionate, agile, collaborative and entrepreneurial. We’ve often talked about ourselves as being a smaller, more focused entity, with the huge resources of GroupM behind us.
One platform.

The Trade Desk: powering Maxus in RTB
Ad Age: When you talk to clients, how do you pitch the strengths of Maxus? Why do you tell them they need to hire you? What do you bring to the table that's different?

Mr. Jones: We have this mantra around here called PACE. It stands for passionate, agile, collaborative and entrepreneurial. We've often talked about ourselves as being a smaller, more focused entity, with the huge resources of GroupM behind us. One of the ways that manifests itself in the way that we operate is, between myself and the COO, we know just about every CMO or CEO for every company that we work for, and they know who we are. We're not about hierarchy. Lots of times I go to a business pitch and people will say, "You're very nice, Louis, but I'm sure I'll never see you again." And I say, "Not true at all, just ask any of my clients."

Ad Age: Does that reflect your much-publicized lack of hierarchy and lack of structure that a lot of other agencies have?

Mr. Jones: Yes, it does. I would like to believe that we are more approachable, more likable, more collaborative in how we do everything. I don't have an office; I sit out on the floor with everyone else. No one is in an office at Maxus, nobody. We are always sort of moving and recombining in breakout rooms for all of the teams. We're out on the floor, we can ask each other questions. "Have you tried this company in social? What has your experience been?" So I think it keeps the conversation open about what our collective experience is; it helps us to share faster and more efficiently.

Ad Age: Maxus has a global network and, although you do have global clients, much of your focus is on local clients for each of those offices. Do your staff and the offices collaborate?

Mr. Jones: We have this online collaboration platform called I am Maxus. All the Maxus employees and offices are on it, and it is a fervent exchange of things that have been done, things that we know, questions that people want to know about how media operates in different parts of the world. We did a PACE contest on the portal to show which office can show more of those qualities than the rest of the world. We just used it as a way to recruit young people across the world into what you might call a young rising star program called Endeavor. For another pitch, I'm asking someone to come over from China and another person to come over from Singapore to give us a true view of the APAC region.

Ad Age: Talk about where you'd really like to see the agency in another five to 10 years. How do you see it growing?

Mr. Jones: This is a topic of great discussion internally. I think there is something quite charming about us being who we are today, from a size perspective. I think we could be a great midsize agency, which really focuses on building, architecting and executing consumer and customer experiences vis-à-vis this thing that we call media. I'd like not to be the size of my three sisters, because then I think there are some real issues around what makes us different within the house of GroupM. But I think we'll always take a more heartfelt approach toward our clients. We'll focus on making sure that we have the right people with the right spirit, and we'll continue to create products that answer the questions that no one seems to be able to answer in the marketplace. And I think that's where we play really nicely.

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Scan here to watch Scott Ferber, CEO, Videology, discuss video convergence.

For more information, contact Brian Danzis, SVP, Sales, Americas at brian@videologygroup.com
Talking about digging into data is one thing; doing it well is another. Maxus dug deep for three clients—Barclays, BT and Church & Dwight—and produced campaigns that exceeded expectations for all three.

**BARCLAYS**

A year ago, Barclays announced it was expanding its consumer operations by offering online savings accounts and certificates of deposit to U.S. customers. Its goal? An ambitious $1 billion in new deposits by year-end.

The global financial services provider saw online banking as a cost-effective way to generate capital for credit card issuance, particularly as lawmakers were considering legislation that encouraged banks to meet capital requirements with deposits rather than other sources.

With help from Maxus, Barclays not only achieved its goal but did so two months ahead of schedule. In part as a result, Barclays is expanding its relationship with Maxus this year.

A key factor in the campaign’s success was Maxus’ ability to help Barclays identify prime prospects and their behaviors.

“One of the things Maxus was so successful at doing was helping us refine our audience,” says Jill Margolis, Barclays director of digital marketing. “Maxus’ technology enabled us to undertake a detailed audience study, allowing us to identify and understand who was actually converting—and, in some cases, who came to the site but didn’t convert.”

A big challenge Barclays faced was that it was entering a highly competitive online deposits market without much brand awareness, says Brian Stern, Maxus senior partner and strategic planning director overseeing the agency’s Barclays business. The bank had closed its U.S. branches in the 1990s and had focused instead on its Barclaycard credit card, investment banking and wealth management services in the U.S.

Barclays decided to use digital rather than traditional media, Mr. Stern says, because in previous campaigns digital had proven effective, and using digital to reach the target audience for an online bank made sense for behavioral reasons. Additionally, digital gave Barclays the ability to track the campaign’s success in real time.

Digital as a percentage of total media spending continues to see increases. According to the IAB Internet Advertising Revenue Report, digital advertising revenues climbed to a record high of $36.6 billion in 2012, up 15 percent over 2011; according to Advertising Age’s Agency Report, digital services accounted for almost one-third—32.5 percent, or $11.6 billion—of U.S. agency revenue in 2012.

At the outset, Barclays and Maxus agreed the approach should be to gain awareness before driving acquisition, using display for awareness and search to drive acquisitions. They started out with an initial assumption that “the easiest and lowest-hanging fruit” would be British ex-pats, Mr. Stern says, because those most familiar with Barclays would be the most likely to sign up for the online bank.

Maxus created a plan for search using sophisticated optimization tools, reputation management and attention to efficiency to drive maximum performance and reinforce branding efforts. While the campaign brought in deposits, Maxus soon realized they weren’t coming from British ex-pats. Using data from thousands of opened accounts—representing display, paid and organic search as well as natural traffic—Maxus learned that its prime target was male, age 26 to 36, married, with one child. He was college-educated, working in finance and accounting, had excellent credit and a high income. He was into social media, art and music, and liked international travel, outdoor sports and the latest technology trends. “This analysis from Maxus enabled us to understand, at a very granular level, who was actually opening accounts with us,” Ms. Margolis says. “It helped us to identify and ultimately to better reach our true customer.”

In the end, the search portion of the campaign far exceeded expectations. In fact, search was expected to deliver 18 percent of the total deposit amount and ended up producing one-third.

The way Maxus approached this campaign is a good example of relying much more on science than art, Mr. Stern says. “We are getting to a level where we can prove ROI through an incredible amount of data and analytics. It gives us a much richer and deeper understanding of how best to talk to consumers and when best to talk to them.”

**BT**

Long-established U.K. telecom BT has a large, broad customer base, but the company (formerly known as British Telecom) has found itself competing in a fast-changing category.

While overall ad spending in the U.K. in 2012 fell 1 percent, ad spending by British telcos rose 21 percent over the previous year.

To stay ahead of a growing number of rivals, BT decided to promote BT Infinity, a faster broadband service. The company had been working with Maxus on a traditional multimedia campaign to reach a broad audience using TV, outdoor, cinema, print and online advertising. But BT wanted to go after the 18-to-35-year-old crowd.

To reach this group, BT challenged Maxus to come up with ideas to get younger, advertising-cynical broadband users to consider its In-

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MULTI-SCREEN DOESN’T HAVE TO MEAN “JUST ANOTHER SILO TO MANAGE.”

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finite brand. “We were looking for initiatives that would engage with a younger audience and help them get more from using the Internet,” says Graeme Adams, head of media at BT. “We wanted to get millions of people talking about the benefits of our fiber-optic network.”

Maxus looked at the target group’s online behaviors—particularly those centered around music, art, film and gaming—to help focus the campaign on how Infinity could make those experiences even better.

It introduced “BT Infinity Presents Live From the 34th Floor” last fall as a series of three interactive gigs from popular, new musical artists streamed live. The shows took place on the top floor—the 34th—of the BT Tower in central London. “This was a good opportunity to reach people interested in music and a good way of us helping them get more from the Internet. In so doing, it helped us improve brand perceptions amongst younger audiences,” Mr. Adams says.

While brand sponsorship of concerts is not unusual, this campaign was different—especially for BT. Tom Dunn, digital strategy director at Maxus U.K., says the idea was to associate BT Infinity with “the things that broadband gets you,” demonstrating that it provides a more entertaining experience, rather than simply promoting broadband for the sake of having it. “The difference here is the innovative and interesting use of digital media … streaming it live through a variety of placements, including the advertising format itself,” he says.

The campaign involved a lot of consumer participation, including a contest for fans to win one of the hundred or so tickets for each show, voting digitally for favorite songs to be played as an encore and other initiatives that encouraged tweets and comments. For the fans of the bands, the concerts were streamed on BT’s YouTube channel and on Facebook, and could also be seen live in the ad space on the YouTube home page.

“The result was massive exposure,” Mr. Dunn says. “We were taking the content out to where people are, live-streaming it and using technology to allow that to happen [many times over].”

The campaign garnered more than 5 million views of the videos, including about 2 million as a result of viewers sharing through social media. Additionally, an estimated 18.5 million unique users were reached on YouTube.

The campaign was also successful in driving BT’s innovative, fun and entertainment metrics with this audience. Research found the campaign contributed to an 11 percent increase in people who said they were now thinking of BT as an innovative brand and a 32 percent increase in people agreeing with the statement “BT is a brand I feel good about.”

Another positive metric was that people were watching an average of about 20 minutes. “That is quite good in an industry that tends to see the activity averaging 10 or 20 seconds,” Mr. Adams says. “It means we have people properly engaged in consuming our content in a branded environment.”

Having acquired the Trojan brand in 2001, household and personal care products marketer Church & Dwight was the dominant player in the $500 million North American condom market. But with more than a 70 percent share and only one product line—condoms—growing the business was a challenge. So the company decided to expand into the $300 million vibrator market.

James R. Craigie, C&D executive chairman-CEO, told the 2013 Consumer Analysts Group of New York Conference earlier this year that vibrators are part of the company’s strategy to turn Trojan into the company’s next megabrand.

Maxus, the agency for Trojan condoms for about eight years, is an integral part of that strategy. When Trojan Vibrations vibrators were first advertised several years ago, C&D viewed the line as primarily appropriate for a direct response effort handled by a direct response specialist.

But with a commitment to get vibrators out in the open and onto retail shelves, C&D reassigned Vibrations to Maxus early in 2012, aligning the full Trojan portfolio of condoms and vibrators under one agency. This allows Maxus to “apply learnings from the individual pieces of the business” across the entire line of products, says Maxus managing partner Jane Barasch, who oversees the Trojan account.

Another reason C&D chose Maxus was to take advantage of LIVE, a proprietary marketing-performance management platform from Maxus parent GroupM. LIVE provides a real-time view of business performance, identifies and supports optimization decisions, and provides insights into channel performance. Advertisers are able to monitor, evaluate and optimize their marketing investments.

Focusing on paid search and an expanded direct-response TV effort, Maxus has helped C&D grow the Vibrations brand. During Maxus’ first year working on Vibrations, the products saw a 15 percent revenue increase and a 25 percent increase in average order value.

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Maxus used LIVE to set up a plan for tracking and reporting data and analytics. “There are feeds coming in from various sources—retail sales, our media plan, the call center data,” Ms. Barasch says. “It helps you visualize all that data. Different views [help] you understand everything holistically so that you can see what is happening in all different aspects of the business and draw insights about what impacts the business.”

One major challenge C&D faced was to get more TV stations to accept the advertising, particularly during daytime. TV was important for generating more much-needed brand awareness, Ms. Barasch says.

Many stations wouldn’t accept vibrator advertising or limited the time periods when it could run. “When we took over the business, a lot of the inventory was running in the post-1 a.m. time slots. We were able to move a lot of the 2 a.m. [slots] back to midnight by leveraging our existing relationships with vendors and networks,” Ms. Barasch says.

Now, the spots have a wider range of placements and are appearing on more than 15 stations with 25 percent of the spots shown outside the overnight time slots.

Maxus also overhauled the paid search strategy to optimize desktop and mobile searches. After learning that 40 percent of search activity came from mobile devices, the agency added a mobile-optimized site.

Ms. Barasch says LIVE has provided a number of other insights, including data on the impact of DRTV on search-related factors such as spending levels; whether search is organic or paid; and the impact on Web traffic and sales in different channels at retail or online.

Because of the value already seen in how activities in different parts of the business affect each other, the shop plans to use LIVE across the entire Trojan line this year.

Data is critically important in today’s digital world, but clients are inundated. “This is a way to put the data in one place to use it in a meaningful way,” Ms. Barasch says. “It also helps you to understand which pieces of data are important for your business, which the real drivers are.”