

VEGAS INC

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VEGAS INC FILE

POWER TRIO: Law students, from left, Corina Rocha, Siria Gutierrez and Leslie Nino Fidance pose outside Boyd Law School at UNLV.

GENERATION NEXT

TOMORROW'S LEADERS EXPECTED TO DIVERSIFY HISPANIC BUSINESS COMMUNITY

By **Conor Shine**

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Southern Nevada's Hispanic business community was growing exponentially. ¶ A surge in the Latino population, paired with Las Vegas' booming economy, created new demand and a new market for businesses catering to Hispanics. At the same time, a new wave of Hispanic entrepreneurs, traditionally underrepresented among the ranks of business owners, stepped in to meet the growing valley's needs. ¶ Then, the Great Recession hit and derailed the economy, crushing many businesses with it. Small companies owned by Latinos were especially hard hit.

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SPECIAL FOCUS

MINORITY BUSINESS

This month, VEGAS INC looks at workplace diversity in the valley.

LIVING OUT THE REALITIES OF REALITY TV

By **Jim Gentleman**,
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, SK+G

I had mixed feelings last June when I heard that a production company was interested in featuring SK+G in "The Pitch," a new reality TV series from AMC, a cable network whose shows bleed tension and drama as appropriately depicted in the network's tagline, "Story Matters Here."

Nearly a year later and after the recent airing of our episode, I still have conflicting emotions about the experience.

On the one hand, a chance to compete (and hopefully win) against another agency for business on national TV represented a huge new business opportunity for our agency. A win would put us on the map and significantly increase our awareness among potential clients and employee recruits.

On the other hand, what if we lost? It's bad enough losing in private, but losing on national TV in front of

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The Oliver Stone-like conspiracy theory turned out to be all too real.

HAIL MARY | P. 21

Columnist Richard N. Velotta on whether DesertXpress can be salvaged.

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This week: Accounting firms



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OF 100 HOURS FILMED, ONLY 18 MINUTES OF SK+G MADE IT ON AIR

THE PITCH, FROM PAGE 1

millions of people was another thing. And how would our day-to-day business and operations be impacted with a production crew of five people following our every move for 10 consecutive days with microphones and cameras in tow?

It seemed unnatural and too unpredictable. The production company (Studio Lambert) told us that this wasn't just any reality TV show. They told us "The Pitch" would provide an authentic, "documentary-style" inside look at the world of advertising. "We'll make you guys look great," they promised.

After a few meetings and internal deliberations, a group of us at the agency (Managing Partners John Schadler and Jerry Kramer, Managing Director Ellen Curtis and I) agreed to participate in "The Pitch." As an independent shop just 12 years old, we had nothing to hide and everything to gain from an appearance on "The Pitch." We always advise our clients to take calculated marketing risks. It was time for us to do the same.

At the same time, dozens of other agencies across the country – many of them bigger and better known than SK+G – were turning down "The Pitch." Some said that they didn't want to share their "secret sauce," a lame excuse because there is no secret sauce in advertising. Great advertising comes from smart, curious, insightful and creative people. More than likely, the agencies who said, "No thanks," felt that they had everything to lose and nothing to gain. They didn't need the exposure as much as an agency like SK+G did.

Studio Lambert's crew showed up at SK+G in November ready to go, full of pep and eager to capture the tense moments and extreme personalities that would make for good TV. SK+G was ready to oblige.

Over the course of 10 days, our pitch team (Jerry, Ellen, Ray Johnson, Doug Hentges and I) traveled twice to Houston, first to meet and be briefed by our prospective client, Waste Management, an environmental solutions company (fancy speak for trash pick-up, recycling services and alternative uses for waste), then to present our integrated campaign solution in "The Pitch's" climactic presentation scene.

Back at the agency and in between our trips to Texas, there were internal meetings, briefings, brainstorming sessions, laughing, arguing, whining,



COURTESY ART

HIGH STAKES: "The Pitch" featured Las Vegas' SK+G ad agency competing for a Waste Management contract.

indigestion, consternation, doubt, hope, despair, and all of the emotions and activities you'd expect an agency to experience preparing for an important pitch.

I'd guess Studio Lambert shot more than 100 hours of footage of the agency, 18 or so minutes of which made it into the final cut – representing less than a half of a percent of the total amount of footage shot at SK+G. Suffice to say, the editors would play a critical role in determining how SK+G was portrayed. While we had control over what we said and did in the 100 hours, we had no control over the 18 minutes that made it into the hourlong show.

Before we left Houston for the final time, we found out we won. More than anything, I felt a sense of relief. "No matter how we're portrayed on TV, at least we won," I thought.

We wanted to surprise the agency with the good news, so the five of us (Jerry, Ellen, Ray, Doug and I) vowed on Saturday night as we left Waste Management not to say anything until we met with the entire agency Monday morning.

Of the countless hours I'd spent on "The Pitch" over the past year, the 15 minutes during that Monday morning agency announcement were by far the most gratifying of the entire experience. It made the whole thing worth it.

Because, finally, that's where the dozens of people who do the actual work and make SK+G a great agency received the attention, recognition and gratitude they richly deserve when Jerry

uttered the words, "We won." They – the copywriters, art directors, designers, production artists, account executives, mediaplanners and buyers, traffic team, public relations personnel, interactive programmers and developers, and agency support staff – were the true stars of "The Pitch."

For any of you who've seen SK+G's episode on "The Pitch," I'm sure you noticed the arrogance of Ray, the argument between Jerry and me, the hyped creative tension between Doug and Ray, and the almost comedic "speaker" mishap during our final presentation.

Unfortunately, the editors left out a lot of the important stuff that took place at SK+G during the shoot that evidently didn't make for "good TV" – the strategy discussions, the consumer insights, the complete integrated campaign we created, the laughter and the overall camaraderie at our agency.

It's been three weeks since our episode aired. While I received many nice notes from current and former clients, colleagues, friends and family, the agency took a beating in the advertising blogosphere. We were chided for our work, the presentation, our perceived failings.

"The Pitch" (and its editors) ultimately portrayed SK+G as the big, bad guys from Las Vegas against the empathetic, struggling agency from New York. What a joke. Through the magic of reality TV and "Story Matters Here"-focused editing, the real work and rewarding

journey took a back seat to personalities and exaggerated storylines.

I am genuinely fascinated at the level of interest and viciousness that our show created among our critics from a mere single hour on television. Thanks to social media, everyone's an expert with an opinion these days – and an instantaneous worldwide public forum via the Internet. (But, evidently, not everyone has a job, based on the amount of time some of these people spent attacking SK+G.)

Along with our PR team and other agency executives, I have tried to balance the chatter by posting blogs and Facebook updates and sending tweets to share what really happened during the show in hopes of providing a more accurate representation of the agency.

Equally important, we finished a successful project with Waste Management, having developed a multimedia campaign (broadcast, online and print) promoting the company's involvement on the show. We are hopeful that this experience will lead to more work down the road for a progressive company we would have never had a chance to work for had it not been for our involvement on "The Pitch."

Are we a different agency post-"The Pitch"? Not really. We've gained some national awareness, lost some people (Ray has moved on to another city and agency) and learned a lot.

SK+G is like most reputable agencies. It has its ups and downs, good days and bad days. But what I cherish the most about SK+G are its people.

Great advertising isn't about the building in which you work, the so-called processes you employ, the emerging technologies that surround you or the new media on the horizon. It's all about the people who do it. And no matter how we were portrayed on "The Pitch," the people I'm lucky enough to work with at SK+G are top-notch in every way.

One more thing: My experience on "The Pitch" confirmed that I'm just not cut out for reality TV. I'm not as bombastic as Donald Trump, as controversial as Snooki, as fearsome as Dog the Bounty Hunter, as boisterous as Sharon Osbourne or as unpredictable as Chumlee.

And I'm perfectly fine with that. **VI**