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Why they had to split
Gwyneth Paltrow and Chris Martin on the end of their marriage
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How Grey got its colour back

Gideon Spanier



AFTER years of living up to its name for the wrong reasons, advertising agency Grey has hit a rich vein of form. The Hatton Garden-based agency, headed by chief executive Chris Hirst and chief creative officer Nils Leonard, is behind some of the most talked-about campaigns around.

These range from the shamelessly populist (a bunch of kittens emerge from a packet of McVitie's biscuits with the message "sweet") to the stylish (the Sunday Times' Icons campaign took famous Britons such as Kate Moss and elevated them to royalty, reflecting the paper's aim to be iconic, and the images became a viral hit outside the UK).

Although this work shows a belief in traditional advertising, Grey has also been innovative. It worked with drinks firm Lucozade and music company Ministry of Sound to commission DJ Fresh to make Louder, a pumping dance anthem that became the most pre-ordered song on iTunes and topped the charts. The subsequent Lucozade ad was also the music video.

Meanwhile, a Sunday Times "Culture" ad recreated a series of familiar movie and TV scenes from hits such as Mad Men and was filmed in a single shot.

"Our aim is to get our work to make it into culture," says Leonard, as he explains how they begin thinking about a campaign by asking: "What is the cultural ambition of this project?" Then there is a better chance it will be memorable. It is the power of what Grey likes to call "long ideas", not just big ideas.

He hopes a new initiative for stationers Ryman can also tap into culture – by doing good. Grey has devised a printer font that is more



R

Grey's anatomy: (clockwise from top) a McVitie's biscuits ad featuring kittens, the Ryman Eco font that uses less ink, Kate Moss as royalty for the Sunday Times' Icons campaign, and a Lucozade ad featuring DJ Fresh's song Louder. Below are chief creative officer Nils Leonard (left) and chief executive Chris Hirst



eco-friendly because there is white space within each letter, rather than solid ink. The free font, Ryman Eco, uses a third less ink than the average font and could save 490 million ink cartridges a year.

The agency's new-found mojo is notable because it comes after a long, weak period for Grey, which has a history dating back half a cen-

tury and is headquartered in America as part of ad giant WPP's empire.

When Hirst, 42, took charge in 2010, he and Leonard, now 36, set out first to improve the internal culture. Being "open" is their buzzphrase.

A priority for Leonard as executive creative director (ECD) was to delegate responsibility, instead of his signing off every piece of work. "A lot of ECDs aren't open to ideas," he says, recalling his youth when top creatives acted like "we're the guv'nors" and stifled junior staff and account directors. "I have a real bugbear about the trade union of creativity." Hirst says Grey's open culture has led to better talent joining, with UK staff

more than doubling to 500 since 2009. Annual revenues have risen to around £55 million from £20 million.

Grey's charmed run continued this week as Vodafone, already a client in Ireland, gave it a big UK campaign for the first time. HSBC's decision to drop Grey, only months after it won the account, was a rare setback last year.

Half of Grey's work comes from overseas and Hirst warns UK politicians' "hostile" rhetoric about immigration and increased red tape threaten to undermine London's status as a magnet for global talent: "Our competition is now not just agencies in Soho but those in China, Latin America and the US."