



Adland's new broom

Darren Woolley is the man ad agencies love to hate: his strategic reviews tell advertisers whether they are getting value for money. **By Simon Lloyd**

Marketing consultancies come and go in Australia with monotonous regularity, but when Darren Woolley fixed the "P3" shingle to his door for the first time in 2000, he knew, in his own words, he was "on to a good thing".

Why? In under a week, the first client to come knocking was Coles Myer. Since then, Australia's biggest retailer has been joined on P3's client portfolio by a list of top 200 companies seeking the counsel of Woolley and the 11 other consultants he employs full-time. Clients range from banks and financial institutions to car makers and retailers.

In late 1999, as creative director of the ad agency J Walter Thompson, Woolley found a hole in the marketing arena. He had regular contact with some of the country's biggest advertisers and their complaints were always the same. "They all said their ad agency did not understand them, was not cost-effective and just kept on churning out ads. It was a consistent gripe, but at the same time, my agency peers were moaning that clients did

not understand creativity and would not pay for it."

Woolley saw an opportunity and set up P3. The name is based on what Woolley calls his three business pillars: people, purpose, process. At the time, no consultancy could provide impartial, expert advice on whether companies were spending too much on cam-

UNORTHODOX APPROACH

INNOVATIONS

First Australian toxic solvent recycling company; remuneration auditing and strategic counsel across all marketing disciplines.

PHILOSOPHY

"Sir Francis Bacon's 'knowledge is power' edict drives everything we do."

MOST ADMIRED INNOVATOR

"Richard Branson is ... the best at seeing gaps in the market and innovating to fill them."

COMPANY REVENUE

Not revealed, but has doubled since 2003, and understood to be well over \$1 million in 2004-05.

SOURCE: BRW

paings, and getting their money's worth in terms of innovation and value from advertising agencies, production houses and media buyers.

Like most successful innovators, finding a gap in a market, then taking a risk to fill it, has been fundamental to Woolley's approach to business. It has led him down an unorthodox career path. A medical science graduate, he started work as a neuropathology researcher at Melbourne's Royal Children's Hospital. After three years, he noticed that no company in Australia was recycling toxic solvents, and in 1994, with a business partner (whom he does not name), founded Resolve Pty Ltd to do just that.

The initiative was successful. But after two years, Woolley — having borrowed \$10,000 to finance double that amount in equipment leasing — wanted to look for venture capital. His partner disagreed and Woolley sold his share in Resolve (the company wound up two years later). Woolley says: "But it got my interest going in marketing and advertising because we had a service nobody else was offering at the time. I was doing the sales and marketing to create a demand and it worked."

A five-year career in advertising, direct marketing and production followed, starting at the Mattingly agency, whose flagship client in the mid-1990s was Coles Myer.

Woolley put remuneration under the microscope for clients for the first time, and it is small wonder many executives from ad agencies and print and TV production houses pale when they learn a client is using P3's services. But they have had to get used to it as remuneration auditing has become standard practice for most big advertisers. "They ask whether they are paying too much, usually because of a budget blowout, missed deadlines, a campaign with no results or disagreements with the agency over intellectual property," Woolley says.

"That is often a trigger for [clients] to ask if there is an alternative after 10 or 15 years of doing things the same way. What we show them is that there isn't one remuneration model for everyone. There are some standard outcomes you want from remuneration but how you get it depends on the individual parties and we show them how to do it." ●