

ABOVE: An image by photographer Jeremiah Watt on the website of fly fishing company Sage, a Hammerquist Studios client. Hammerquist works with photographers who have a passion for the outdoor pursuits they're asked to depict.

CREATIVE AGENCY HAMMERQUIST STUDIOS FOCUSES ON OUTDOOR BRANDS AND THEIR VALUES

The outdoor industry has in recent years become a proving ground for advertising and brand communications that focus on values. Outdoor enthusiasts have responded to brand messages that offer journalistic stories about people's love for adventure; about environmentalism and conservation; about responsibly sourced or recycled materials; and about choosing experiences over conspicuous consumption. This has created a market in which the values a company stands for can be just as important as the goods they make or the outdoor experience they provide.

Values are hard to fake. It takes people with a real interest in fly fishing or skiing or rock climbing to create convincing stories about those pursuits. Hammerquist Studios, a Seattle-based creative agency that works with companies such as Sage (fly fishing), Hydro Flask (water bottles) and Kōkatat (paddle sports), operates at the intersection of marketing and communications expertise, and a genuine love of the outdoors. The photographers they work with have a similar combination of creative and technical skill, and passion for being outside. *PDN* recently spoke with Dan Kostrzewski, creative director at Hammerquist Studios, about trends in outdoor industry advertising, and about what they look for in the photographers they hire.

PDN: What differentiates Hammerquist Studios among outdoor-focused agencies? Why are your clients drawn to your work?

DAN KOSTRZEWSKI: It starts with our founder, Fred Hammerquist. Fred was one of the first guys to combine a traditional agency model with a passion for the outdoors. Everyone who works here has a lifelong career in the outdoor industry, has a passion—whether it's skiing or snowboarding or climbing or riding their bike across South America, whatever it is. There's a huge amount of passion for the cultures that we come from, and I think that really sets the work [we do apart].

PDN: Are there unique characteristics to the way you work with your clients?

DK: One of the things that seems to be happening right now is more and more specialization in the agency world. But we develop these very long-term relationships with brands, going through an entire lifecycle of projects. We'll work with a brand on everything from brand strategy all the way to the media buy, and I think in that respect we become more of a trusted partner for a brand. If brands are looking for someone to work on a three-month or six-month project, we view those as a good starting point but look to build connections with more of a long view.

PDN: What types of imagery and storytelling do customers for outdoor brands respond to currently? What gets the attention of an outdoor enthusiast?

DK: That merge between editorial-[style] content and the essence of what a brand stands for creates this element of really powerful brand storytelling that hits a more emotional, value-based level. We've seen that brands are responding to that and customers are responding to that, and that's what excites us.

A good example is some of the work we've done lately for Sage, which is a fly fishing company based on Bainbridge [Island, WA]. We've done a ton of emotional, real, strong, immersive photo content that really connects with the core of the culture and the passion for why people fly fish. We've used a lot of photographers who have that passion for those worlds and cultures. We've seen that as something that folks are responding to. From a content marketing perspective, the word "authentic" is a little bit overused, but that's really the essence of it: Trying to tell the story of the souls of the brands and where they come from and what they stand for.

PDN: It seems challenging to tell a deeper story given how little time consumers are willing to spend with content. How do you create content that accounts for attention spans but also goes deeper?

DK: People are hit with a lot of surface-level messaging these days, but for a brand, it's much more powerful to be able to connect with someone emotionally. We take more of a tiered approach. A content campaign may be tailored to different mediums, so you may get a hint of a story on Instagram or a hint of a story in a promoted video or a teaser clip, but the deeper you go into the story [by following a link] the more you get. [For example,] you've gone to a content landing page that has a full photo gallery and podcast and a five-minute piece that tells a full story [about a brand or athlete]. Then [the agency figures] out how you pulse out that campaign to drive home that story with the most impact. I think you can really get people to get people immersed in something that way, and I think that's where you get the emotional connection.

PDN: What, if anything, has shifted in outdoor industry advertising in the past few years?

DK: I see the importance of a constant generation of content and storytelling through all the various mediums to maintain an effort to tell your brand story on a consistent basis. You don't create one ad campaign a year and a couple of videos and then you're done until the next campaign. All these brands need

to fill their airwaves and get good content out there on a consistent basis, so you see a big opportunity for a lot of different content producers to create good pieces.

PDN: Are there any other trends in outdoor industry advertising that you think are important?

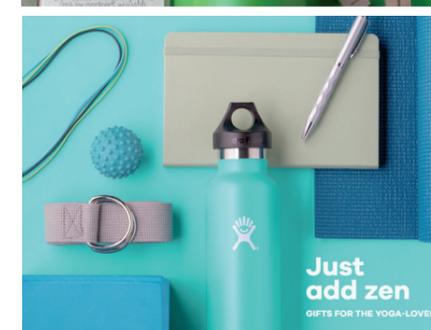
DK: A couple of brands started this idea of telling your brand story at a deeper level and connecting with people on more of a value-based level. That seems to be a really strong theme right now. You're seeing a lot more campaigns that aren't just product driven. For example, the Opt Outside campaign with REI—that was huge because it reflected what they stood for as a brand and it was running counter to the trends in the wider world. And Patagonia's had a lot of campaigns like that, too—Bears Ears, Worn Wear, I Vote—that speak to conservation, activism and a different version of consumerism, where you're not actually selling anything but you're just promoting what you represent as a brand.

PDN: Do you primarily work with photographers who have experience in the outdoor industry, or do you look more at their experience creating advertising?

DK: With the more storytelling imagery, it's really being immersed in those cultures. You're not going to explain fly fishing to someone in an hour-long pre-pro call; it's got to be someone who's lived in those worlds and understands those cultures and is immersed in that lifestyle to really get the right angle on it. Same thing with climbing and skiing and all those sports—the key to getting the right folks is [finding] people who understand those cultures and those worlds. There are so many talented people within those worlds that there's a wide range of styles and overall look and feel [that you can choose from]. There's a huge diversity of folks that you can work with in all of those [sports].

PDN: Documenting an adventure can be a very different process than creating advertising. Do photographers struggle to make that transition from outdoor adventure documentation to advertising?

DK: It really depends. A good example of something in the middle was a studio [imagery-based] campaign that we did with Sage. Earl Harper is a phenomenal studio photographer so he's got that skill set, but he's got a passion for fly fishing too. We wanted to shoot the Sage reels in this really elevated way, but also pair it with hand-tied flies that drove home the handcrafted nature of Sage fishing products. [Harper] was able



ABOVE: Hammerquist commissions a range of types of imagery for their clients. They hired photographer Earl Harper to create these laydown images of Hydro Flask water bottles, which were used on websites, in emails and in social media campaigns.

ALL PHOTOS © HYDRO FLASK/PHOTOS BY EARL HARPER

Over the past two years, we did a lot of creative work with Hydro Flask and the challenge with that brand was to define a specific look and feel. For example, a product laydown shot. Brands have done tons of campaigns around laydown shots, but for last year's holiday campaign we went into the studio and tried to develop a specific, own-able feel that felt right for the rest of the brand. The brand was all about color, so color became a key part of the laydown product photography, and that was a campaign that went out in all sorts of different mediums, on the website, email campaigns, social campaigns.

PDN: Are you creating a lot of image libraries that can be used across channels?

DK: With outdoor clients, some of them are sending big seasonal shoots out, others are getting submissions and working with their own photographers, and some are doing these hybrid content campaigns where it's kind of a mix of trying to get some more good brand imagery from a content trip [sponsored by the client] or something similar to that. And then some of the brands have a huge library of influencer and ambassador images that they want to use to support the campaign.

With Hydro Flask, we were the agency that helped them with their seasonal, evergreen shoot down in Point Reyes, California. That was a Ty Milford shoot, and the assets went into their seasonal library, so that shoot had to [yield] everything they were going to need from a commercial lifestyle component for the course of the year.

PDN: How do you find the photographers you work with?

DK: It's through our past relationships. Fred's got a long history in this industry and has worked with a ton of photographers. We have folks here who have worked at Outdoor Research, Red Bull, Black Diamond and K2, and I've got a history with a bunch of brands in my past, too. We definitely know a lot of photographers from those past relationships. And then, even though there are other outdoor agencies out there, we still have a lot of photographers who find us because there's a real level of excitement for working in our industry and working for the brands that we work for, so it's still kind of a small world.

PDN: So you hear pretty regularly from photographers who want to work with you?

DK: We hear from a lot of people. It's good because we're not getting a lot of people who don't specialize in our industry or have a passion for it. They find us because we're likeminded.

PDN: What types of imagery are you creating for your clients?

DK: It depends on the client and what they're looking for, but we have a really broad range.