

Andy Latimer:

Welcome to Bluewater Talks. I'm Andy Latimer and today, we're going to be talking about the future of Bluewater, where it's going, where it's been, of course, and what the future holds now that we're in a post 2020 world with new consumer behaviors, new marketing behaviors, and what it means for the future of the business.

Andy Latimer:

Some changes here going on at blue water, I'm now joined by the new CEO and the new COO of Bluewater, Rob Fallon and Gina Pomponi. You guys have been around for a bit. For those of you who don't know, Rob has been my partner since the inception of Bluewater, been here for the whole time and been the right hand for forever, if you will say. So as I take the chairman role, I know that the CEO is the right CEO, the right choice and knows the history. He knows the future of what's going on. And Gina joined us I guess, five years ago and has been-

Gina Pomponi:

Five years.

Andy Latimer:

... and has been an unbelievably dynamic change agent in helping the business grow. And this team right here from an operational standpoint has been running it really for the last couple of years, anyway. Now it's just more official in the sense that they've got the reins and they've got a plan for the future.

Rob Fallon:

Absolutely.

Andy Latimer:

So, Rob?

Rob Fallon:

Yeah.

Andy Latimer:

When you look back and you sit here and you say, where the heck is this business come from and where does it sit today and what do you see originally from the core of it? Where we are now and where do you think it should go?

Rob Fallon:

Yeah, I think from the core, it's definitely evolved, right? It's been a long journey and an exciting one. I think, every business you have this sort of up and down and we've been on a really pretty steady clip for quite a long time. Obviously had our hurdles, but I think it's not enough to evolve without adding the word growth, and that means personal, that means professional, it's the business, right? So I think evolution is the strength of where we've come from and where we're going. But yeah, we want to grow the hell out of it. Right? And I think we're poised to do so just from where we've come from, what we've built along the way.

Andy Latimer:

Well, I think when you look back at it from a standpoint of the challenge of Bluewater from the beginning was that it was that it started in the great recession. So it was forced to have a principle of proper cashflow management, debt-free business growth and making a profit all along the way. So those core principles have been kind of from a business standpoint that path. So, still a debt-free company still driving in the right direction.

Gina Pomponi:

Right.

Andy Latimer:

Still making profits. But I think the scale kind of changed a bit when we started to go from the core of it being creative-

Rob Fallon:

Creative, right?

Andy Latimer:

... and then expanding that and seeing that our clients needed other services. They needed other services like media?

Gina Pomponi:

Right. Yeah. And I think you guys had such a strong, solid creative base. And then I know you all recognized that making those great creatives, sending them out into the world and then never getting any feedback or seeing them run or never really understanding how that loop closed, so I think it was brilliant that you guys decided to expand those services. Hence you found me, which was great. Love it here. The television division took off, right? And the digital division quickly followed and we've had hockey stick growth over the past two years in digital, which is amazing. And we rounded those services off, right?

Gina Pomponi:

You can come to Bluewater and we look at everything holistically. We're looking at your marketing challenge and we're approaching it from every angle. Website, web development, we have a complete marketplace division. We've got digital content. Acknowledged that creative is not just television creative. We live in a multi-screen world. So you've got digital content that plays into that beautifully and the services have just rounded out beautifully. And we've got some really great things coming up as well. Some new exciting features for the year.

Rob Fallon:

Absolutely.

Gina Pomponi:

Yeah. In 2021.

Rob Fallon:

2021, I fully expect it to be a brighter year. Right? And obviously 2020, everyone wants to go ahead and finish burning that off. But 2021, I mean for Adidas C and brand Adidas C company, I mean, you're right in the middle of the greatest opportunity we've ever had.

Gina Pomponi:

Oh God, yeah.

Rob Fallon:

Right? So that changed that 2020 really forced people right into our type of funnel. Right?

Andy Latimer:

Right.

Rob Fallon:

And that's an amazing opportunity. And yes, the evolution has come from creative and production, which is one pillar of the agency now to this fully converged story. And what that really means is how are we helping you attack your entire marketing strategy and your campaigns from not only the creative and the media placement and the digital and your funnel, and what's happening inside of every aspect of digital, because it's so broad? Right? Where are you on TV shopping? Are you on TV shop? Are you in marketplace? We want to see all of it so we can help raise all of it. How does one lever pull the other and bring us from, okay, this campaign, it's disruptive, but does it work here, here, and here? And those are all certain-

Gina Pomponi:

Sure, because there's not off the shelf plans. Every, every client-

Rob Fallon:

Everything is custom.

Gina Pomponi:

Yeah. Everybody has a different challenge. And we're so well poised to attack it that way.

Andy Latimer:

I think 2020, if you look at it as a pinpoint and it's marked with, yes, everybody's going to remember it as the year of COVID or the year of whatever-

Rob Fallon:

Watershed in history.

Gina Pomponi:

Yeah.

Andy Latimer:

... But what it really is, is a change. It's a seismic change-

Gina Pomponi:

Paradigm shift.

Andy Latimer:

... in consumer behavior, it's a seismic shift in how you market to customers. And not that this wasn't already coming-

Rob Fallon:

Right.

Andy Latimer:

There was already direct to consumer that were starting to recognize this trend and active on it. And they were some of the fastest growing companies in America and fastest growing companies in the world.

Rob Fallon:

Absolutely.

Andy Latimer:

You can tell that by the stock market, you can tell that across the board.

Rob Fallon:

Right.

Gina Pomponi:

Yeah.

Andy Latimer:

However, I mean, I think the shift that's occurred now is opened up opportunities for other brands to start to step into a direct to consumer space and made it even more so apparent.

Andy Latimer:

Like those as I describe it as I think about it from the consumer side of it, our parents and our grandparents finally accepted that they had to buy online. Well, now the marketers that are traditional brand marketers are finally accepting that they need to directly engage the consumer. So I hear your excitement. I hear your motivation. I hear the energy you're bringing, but what does it mean for clients? What does it mean for your customers, your strategic partners? How is this going to benefit them? And how's it going to add value to their brands and to their business?

Rob Fallon:

Coming here, the way we build value is so it is the whole approach, right? It's that we want to see the whole onion. We want to pull the layers apart and we want to see how we can add value because the only way we grow is to add value to our customers. Right? And that's, that's really the bottom line of any agency, but when we do it, we're sitting here going, okay, first thing I have to do for you is build value. Right? So, we're nothing if we don't add value, either monetarily or expansion or growth. I mean, all of it has to start somewhere. The easiest way for me to make any relationship start is to say, I can save you money, but saving you money doesn't necessarily mean destroying your plan. It means approaching it with the right angle, or saying, "Yes, let's test that. Let's continue to test that. Let's also test this."

Gina Pomponi:

Yeah. And our ability to be nimble in 2020, end of March, April, when it hit, I got to tell you, and Rob will second this, every client's head was on fire because they all had to take a step back and look at their marketing strategy and say, "What the hell are we going to do? How are we going to handle this?" Some had to go up. Some had to go down. Somebody had to completely shift, but because of the nature of our business, because we're converged and have all these services, and we're used to pivoting, we're used to looking at results and pivoting and making changes, it was just, they were in the right hands let's put it that way. And like you're saying, so many traditional marketers having to change as well. Did you watch commercials over Black Friday? Totally crazy. Everybody's offering curbside. Everybody's offering online. The shift, it gave it a huge kick in the ass. Right? And that is what we've been doing for decades. It is the type of marketing that we do. So everybody else is having to shift and change and we're like...

Rob Fallon:

What did we do? We weaponize nimbleness. Right?

Gina Pomponi:

Yeah.

Rob Fallon:

I think that's a great way to put it because allowing people to lever how quickly we could pivot in each of our pillars of our agency, it's allowing them to go "Great, Rob, I need a new creative for this. And Gina, we've got to try something else over here." Right? Okay. Totally calm. Like if you can be calm in that moment and say, "We were built for this." It's a great tool for anybody to lever.

Andy Latimer:

What does a converged agency mean? And what is that today? I guess it really didn't exist in the past.

Rob Fallon:

Right.

Gina Pomponi:

No, although so many agencies say that.

Rob Fallon:

Yeah, they drop the word integrated, this, that. Again, converge for us, it really means lensing the whole pie. Right? And saying, "Okay, we don't want to fight for dollars for just creative. We don't want to fight for dollars for just media. We're not in the business of being a vendor that fights for your dollars because you have something over with some other guy, right." We want to go, "Great. We want to help you in any way we can to help lift your bar and meet your expectations and blow right past them." But the way we best do that is to say, 'Give our creative team a chance to look at it, give our media team a chance to look at it, give our digital experts a chance to look at it. And then when we come together and that's the

way we attack a campaign, and when we do that, that is the convergence. It's a converging of those pillars to give you value and meet and blow past your goals.

Gina Pomponi:

Yeah, and it's no accident that we share a wall. We're looking at results together. We have a full account management team that works with all the teams together. So they are looking at the results, we're able to pivot. We're able to say, you know what? We've got to shift more digitally. We've got to expand here. Let's test long form. I spent a lot of years at media agencies running media agencies and I saw the media.

Rob Fallon:

Yep.

Gina Pomponi:

If I wanted to elicit a change on creative or somewhere else, I had to talk to the client who had to talk to the production company and months go by for me to get a simple edit.

Rob Fallon:

Time's wasted, right?

Gina Pomponi:

Yeah. Now I'm screaming out the door, I'm running, I'm walking down the hallway and I have it like that.

Rob Fallon:

Yeah. And I think that's our USP, right? It's yes to convergence. It's a word. Right? But we want to turn it into a verb, right? Where we've gone from, yes, we have these pillars, but we're converging them to bring you success. Right? And our USP being this all, in-house under one roof strategy and having those people in house so that we can get speed to get you back up faster, to make the turns quicker, to not just say it's the media's fault. I mean, we just landed-

Gina Pomponi:

There's no finger pointing here.

Rob Fallon:

... a kind of a blue chip client that's coming to us and I don't want to talk about their name, but the reason we were selected was because it's one group to blame if it fails. Right? And when we take that accountable approach and shoulder that, there's no better way to say to your client, "It's our accountability." Right? We owe you this and the reason we took this approach is because we want to say, yes, it's, it's our best practice to do it this way. And our suggestion, we do it this way. And when we see the data, I mean, the most important call we have every day is, did you see those numbers? Right? Those numbers help us shape decision. And it happens every 12 hours. Right? So speed.

Andy Latimer:

So obviously in the past, we recognized, and I think from a company standpoint, we recognize that this separation of certain services where you had a separate media agency versus separate creative agencies versus a separate digital agency, you found a lot of this.

Gina Pomponi:

Yeah.

Andy Latimer:

Pointing back and forth. Let's talk about, are there specific examples, keeping brand names out of it, where you've seen a situation where, because they weren't in a converged model and they weren't looking across the platform, because mind you there are great digital agencies and great media agencies and great creative agencies out there that we work with.

Rob Fallon:

And we still work on a la cart.

Andy Latimer:

That really work hand in glove. Right?

Rob Fallon:

Yep.

Andy Latimer:

They can really kind of see past that and share the data and all that. So I don't want to throw anybody under the bus or say anybody out there that there's a negative to it, but are there situations that you've come across, that where in specific examples where those opportunities have been creative, where you looked at it and said, "Okay, there it is."? There's the secret, this is what needs to be done and why it needs to be done. And how have you responded to those situations?

Gina Pomponi:

Sure, and when we have control of it, I can give you examples of where we have not had control of it and its failure and where we have had control of it and been able to shift the marketing.

Andy Latimer:

Right.

Rob Fallon:

Sure.

Gina Pomponi:

We've had a lot of success in the exercise category, right? The fitness category. So we've had some very successful campaigns, but we've also had some where we haven't had complete control over all of the marketing aspects, meaning creative. Now, mind you, even if we're not doing creative, we will provide feedback to our clients, and say, "Look, here's what we see. Here's what we recommend." That doesn't mean we're going to be able to elicit change as we've noticed many times. And we've had a lot of them, and the instance I'm thinking of, none of the changes that we recommended, putting some basic elements back into a creative were done and it failed.

Rob Fallon:

Right.

Gina Pomponi:

Now we've had other clients, I can think of one in the beverage world, come to us that was failing pretty miserably. Come to us, and we looked at them and said, "Hey, we're going to come up with a completely different concept of health and wellness and change your entire marketing strategy in creatively, media, who we target and their success, and I know I can't mention names, but we all know how successful they were. They were purchased by a Fortune, what are they? 100? Fortune three? I don't know. I mean, within six to nine months, we turned them around to the point where they were acquired by a very, very large company. So very successful for them.

Rob Fallon:

Yeah.

Gina Pomponi:

And there's many case studies. It's the opportunity to be able to talk to people and talk to them about the success that we've had in their category-

Andy Latimer:

Right.

Gina Pomponi:

... And what we can show them when we come at it and approach it in a holistic or converged sense.

Rob Fallon:

Yeah. It's a mindset shift for the people on the other end of the phone from us. Right? For them it's they haven't thought about that way. They've had good relationships and again, relationships are people, right? It's hard to break those if you have a good relationship with somebody and sometimes-

Andy Latimer:

And a good trust.

Rob Fallon:

And a good trust, right. And we want to be that. We want to be great stewards of our client's money. Right? That's...

Gina Pomponi:

Sure, because we only make money when they do. Right?

Rob Fallon:

Of course, that's the goal, right? I have no interest in not being a trustworthy source.

Gina Pomponi:

Absolutely.