

Dallas Business Journal

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Window to the world

Dallas Business Journal - by [Karen Nielsen](#) Correspondent

It's no accident the Maple Avenue office of **Revel United LLC** feels a little like the United Nations.

CEO Mark Stafford hails from England, while Creative Director Horacio Cobos is a Honduran native. The co-founders of the 18-month-old brand-advertising agency believe that an international flair gives their clients a creative edge.

"We're two agency owners with cultural sensitivities who can bring an international aspect to the way we think," Stafford said. "We have a wealth of insights from around the world, and we want to share them."

The duo has its sights set on being the next top agency in Dallas, and some unique ways of running the business -- complete with paid cultural trips for its employees.

Their approach appears to be working. With nearly \$7 million in capitalized billings since the company's February 2006 inception, Revel United is beginning to outgrow its office space and plans to more than double its staff to 11 over the next couple of months.

Its client list -- from male cosmetics to telecom companies -- is as diverse as its co-founders, including American Airlines, Baylor Health Care System, Berrett Pest Control, deBoule, Intervoice Inc., Jack Black and Sam's Club.

Stafford and Cobos were colleagues at RBMM/The Richards Group in Dallas before deciding to spring out on their own, founding Revel with a \$20,000 personal investment.

"I had started working at RBMM/Richards Group right out of school, in 1991," said Cobos, who later became a principal at the company. "Then a couple of years ago, Mark came onboard. We were working on a bigger health care system account and things were going so well. It was a seamless partnership, and we decided that we wanted to apply this on our own. We honestly feel we are doing things just a little bit different."

Cobos moved from Honduras to the states when he was 18. Stafford, who was born in London, spent his career in advertising shops such as Leo Burnett, CDP and Bates Worldwide, before taking the leap stateside to gain a "fresh approach."

Nontraditional approach

Both men speak multiple languages and believe their broader view is beneficial to clients in building their brand and advertising campaigns.

"There are 5,000 advertising messages that bombard you every day, and we try to interrupt people's lives to make a difference," Stafford said.

Revel uses a proprietary process it calls "scopics," as in microscopic and telescopic, to clearly define an advertising and branding communications map for a company as a whole, taking into consideration sales, operations, marketing and the bottom line.

To help get its own message across, Revel uses what it calls "Focus Soup." The process features videos from individuals who honestly answer some of life's ongoing questions, and reflects the co-founders' different ideas about pursuing multi-demographic feedback.

"Focus Soup shows people how we think," Stafford said.

Dallas-based Intervoice Inc. signed on with Revel this year to create an integrated "branding foundation" for the technology company. Cory Jones, vice president of corporate marketing, said Revel takes a nontraditional approach to traditional problems.



Kenneth Brock

MIXING IT UP: Revel United's co-founders Horacio Cobos, left, and Mark Stafford say cultural diversity is their agency's biggest asset.

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"Revel is a small shop with big ideas," he said. "Mark and Horacio have a wealth of international experience and spent years working at the world's largest advertising agencies on top global brands in the U.S. and around the world. Interville is a global company, so it's imperative to work with partners like Revel who 'think globally' to ensure our big ideas resonate with all our customers, no matter where they are."

Revel also expects its employees to have diverse cultural experiences and will pay for travel abroad once a year. Employees could choose to work in a soup kitchen in Budapest or climb a mountain in the Himalayas, but they must keep a video or handwritten journal and share their experiences with the company.

Kristin Lichtenauer, vice president of brand marketing, will be the first employee to embark on such a trip. She's preparing to work on an inner city project in eastern Germany.

"Everything is very localized," Stafford said. "That leads to fear about the outside world. For Horacio and I, the world isn't scary, it's fascinating. If we could have a wealth of people in our agency who have all kinds of experiences like this, it would be a pretty exciting place to be a part of."

OUT OF THE BOX

NAME: Revel United LLC

BUSINESS: Full-service brand-advertising agency

HEADQUARTERS: 3001 Maple Ave., Ste. 501, Dallas 75201

OWNERSHIP: Private

TOP EXECUTIVE: Mark Stafford, co-founder, CEO, managing partner

EMPLOYEES: 5, plus multiple contractors

CAPITALIZED BILLINGS: \$4.5 million (March-Dec. 2006)

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