

Advertising and Marketing Solutions and Consultants Helping Brands build Market Share



Prentice Howe
Owner | Executive Creative Director

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Interview conducted by:
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“We help companies embrace their challenger-ability. That’s our mantra and what gets us out of bed each morning. We work with rising brands that may not have the resources of their category leaders but are looking to change the game and steal market share from industry giants.”- Prentice Howe

CEOCFO: Mr. Howe, what is the vision behind Door Number 3?

Mr. Howe: We help companies embrace their challenger-ability. That’s our mantra and what gets us out of bed each morning. We work with rising brands that may not have the resources of their category leaders but are looking to change the game and steal market share from industry giants. Embracing your challenger-ability starts with having a highly differentiated brand positioning. From there, we create an integrated communications plan that builds tribes and achieve revenue goals. It takes an investment to do this, of course, but our team is particularly strong at helping clients outthink when they can’t necessarily outspend.

CEOCFO: Do many people realize they can out think rather than out spend?

Mr. Howe: Many know this but lack the resources or the integrated strategy to do so. Alignment is typically one of the first things that gets in their way. We often work with companies where their leadership team and key stakeholders could all be at the same holiday party, asked individually to describe their company, and they’d all give different answers. In cases like this, we start with brand positioning and uncover the *why* behind what they do instead of the *what*. Brand positioning is critical because it becomes the ethos for everything a company communicates, from the inside out. Once this is defined, we create a path forward with lots of outthinking, from the campaigns we craft to the media tactics we deploy.

CEOCFO: What is an example of how that works?

Mr. Howe: We work with clients to go through a discovery process and a competitive analysis. We interview stakeholders, internal and external. We look at the marketplace, trends and obstacles and really get down to the core of who they are, what they are about and what makes them tick. It’s then our job to distill it down into a substantive positioning that gets

everyone's heads nodding. This is the hardest part. But this process is illuminating because it yields a ton of "a-ha" moments that ultimately shape business strategies. I could give you several examples of how a strong positioning manifests itself into creative work that stands apart. Cap Metro recently tasked us to help increase ridership in Austin. Instead of asking commuters to give up their beloved car (a true obsession for any Texan), we asked them to make room in their lives for one more love by becoming a Two Timer – cheating on their car by riding public transit twice a week. It was cheeky and fun all while throwing down the gauntlet and making a strong point about our collective responsibility to help alleviate Austin's infrastructure crisis. Ticket sales increased 57% when the campaign was in market.

CEOCFO: *What is an example of a challenger personality trait and where does that come into a campaign?*

Mr. Howe: Door Number 3 worked with a regional shipping carrier that was going up against industry giants, FedEx and UPS. They had a very unique style of customer service that just wasn't being expressed. Their customers knew their drivers by name. Some even had their driver's cell phone number. Door Number 3 worked with them to distill that story in a way that the market leaders could never possibly do. It's a personality trait we call "compulsive servitude" - overdelivering to the extent that it becomes the very definition of your brand. Our team ran with that. Today, every communications touch point – from their boxes to their fleet to their website – delivers a consistent message with a uniquely identifiable voice. This is one of many examples of how we can bring out a challenger personality and help move a company or product from being a challenger to being an *empowered* challenger. Empowered challengers are the ones that succeed.

CEOCFO: *Is cost secondary or tertiary to the message or does it depend on the product and industry?*

Mr. Howe: It really varies by industry and product. For example, if you're Walmart, a "low prices" message means something. But there's another challenger personality we call "foster rejection" where you actually *resist* the masses in order to attract your most ardent fans. In this case you might happily price potential customers out of contention for the sake of remaining niche and solidifying your status as an elevated, exclusive brand. Think Christian Louboutin.

CEOCFO: *Are companies and clients turning to you because they know how you approach things and what your philosophy is or is it sometimes a surprise at the way you gain recognition?*

Mr. Howe: They come to us because they know that we understand where they stand in the marketplace and that we have a proven methodology to help them blaze a path forward. Our agency is also big on the element of surprise - giving clients what they ask for but also what they did not think to ask for. That really goes back to our name, Door Number 3.

CEOCFO: *Where do trends fit in and is it important to be against the trend, to be unique or do you need to go with the trend? Along with that, where does gut feeling come into play with your other methods of crafting a solution?*

Mr. Howe: Much of what we do is research based in that we know our audiences, how to reach them and what messages will resonate. But after that, we need to trust our instincts and our track record of having

done this time and time again. Trends can be a part of the mix if it makes sense and it's true to the product. But for the most part, we ignore them and stay true to the voice we're representing. That's why testing a high level message or strategy with consumers can be very useful but testing specific creative executions can be deadly. People sit in a focus group and respond positively to things they've seen before because it's comfortable. But how can a challenger brand make big strides if they're going to dish out the familiar? Thankfully our clients have good instincts, too. They recognize that swimming upstream is often the best way to maximize a marketing spend.

CEOCFO: *What do you look for in your people and know when someone is right for Door Number 3?*

Mr. Howe: I want lovers of underdogs. I want people who enjoy the thrill of outthinking in ways that solve real business challenges. The other thing is cultural fit in terms of playing well with others. We have strategists, writers, designers, social media specialists and media planners/buyers – all under one roof. We are a pretty integrated group, so it is important that people play well in the sandbox. I also look for people that are versatile. We are a smaller agency, so versatility is really important. Then attitude and the ability to bounce back. You can get your spirit broken in this industry and a little too attached to your own ideas, and it is important to know that the well is deep and there is always another great idea around the corner.

CEOCFO: *What, if anything, has changed in your approach over time?*

Mr. Howe: ROI. Clients want a great deal of assurances around their marketing spend. They do not want marketing to be a cost center, they want it to be something that generates revenue. Years ago, we used to present creative on big boards and talk about how cool it was and how fun it would be to execute. We used a lot of adjectives to sell the work. The game has changed so much today where we are marrying together strategy with storytelling and media strategies as well. What good is a beautiful piece of creative if it's off message? Or worse, talking to the wrong audience? So, for us, it's about the right time, the right message and then tying it all to well defined key performance indicators to make sure we're delivering upon what we set out to do.

CEOCFO: *With social media, how do you know when it is changing and what is on the horizon?*

Mr. Howe: We are always learning and not ashamed to say that because I cannot tell you what is going to be happening ten days from now, let alone a year from now. We have someone on our team that leads these learnings, but it changes all the time. The audience that you would target on Facebook four years ago is very different from Facebook's audience today, so the game has shifted and people continue to migrate from one platform to another. We stay on top of this, but in terms of trying to predict the future, I will never dip my toe into that game.

CEOCFO: *How is business?*

Mr. Howe: Business is great. I purchased Door Number 3 in February of 2015 (after having worked here as Executive Creative Director for seven years). We've moved offices and rebranded. We kept our name, of course, but took some time to tighten our story and refresh our branding. We've had a great year and feel grateful that we're able to do what we

love right here in downtown Austin. We're a short walk to Ranch 616.
What more could you ask for?

CEOCFO: *Why choose Door Number 3?*

Mr. Howe: Business is just too competitive not to operate with a challenger ethos. As a full service agency, we empower challenger brands to outthink their competition. It's a transformative process that can change the future of a company.

