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Creative

Campaign of the Year: Hewlett-Packard

Goodby's digital-photo ads are picture-perfect

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PHOTOGRAPH BY GERRY GROPP

In late 2003, Goodby, Silverstein & Partners created "You," an emotional paean to digital photography for Hewlett-Packard in which pieces of images freeze on screen and become floating still pictures, all to the soundtrack of the Cure's hit song "Pictures of You." Last year, the challenge was to create a campaign not only about taking pictures but about printing them as well.

Thinking about that brief one day last spring, French director Francois Vogel sat down at his desk and mocked up a test ad. He blasted the upbeat 1968 Kinks song "Picture Book," which Goodby had already decided it wanted as an anthem, set up a camera and shot himself putting empty frames around his head and neck. Then, using Adobe After Effects and proprietary software he wrote himself, Vogel transformed the video to make it seem as though he were creating still hard-copy photos out of thin air.

Vogel—who had directed the earlier "You," his first commercial job after doing a number of short films in France—was still bidding for the job at the time. But that test sold the creative team on him immediately. In fact, they reshot the test he did as a stand-alone commercial called "Francois."

Prior to the test, the creatives at the San Francisco agency, including creative director Rich Silverstein, cd/art director John Norman and cd/copywriter Steve Simpson, already had a pretty good idea of what they wanted: a spot that started and ended in the same place and used the "Picture Book" song. They had even put together

an elaborate book full of copy lines, visual references and a possible flow for the ad. "We had a lot of structure already," says agency executive producer Josh Reynolds. "Francois actually figured out how to bring visual magic to structure, so we knew right then that was it."

Once Vogel was on board, the next step was to figure out a location to shoot the ads. "HP is such a global brand, we try to avoid doing anything specific to any country or any ethnicity," says Reynolds. "We try to find really interesting locations anywhere, but also [ones that] have not been overshot." Stockholm was chosen because of its long hours of "beautiful light" and its reasonably priced talent, Reynolds says.

During the six-day shoot in June, Vogel would shoot video of the next day's scenes each night, then stay up until the wee hours making tests to show the creatives in the morning. "Phillip Detchmندی [managing director of Tool, which reps Vogel in the U.S.] had a great quote about Francois," Reynolds says. "We were meeting, and Francois opened his computer, and Phillip looked at me and said, 'It's always exciting when he opens up his computer.'"

The resulting campaign, which began rolling out in September, consists of three spots. "Picture Book," in 30- and 60-second versions, shows scenes in Stockholm where parts of the screen suddenly freeze and become still pictures. One scene features two lines of people who trade empty white frames and hold them up in front of their faces—and the frames then become portraits of the people. "Relay" shows people handing off a white frame which captures each scene and morphs between still and moving pictures. And the aforementioned "Francois" shows Vogel himself seeming to snatch pictures of himself out of the air. All of the spots share the song "Picture Book."

Spending was undisclosed. HP spent about \$60 million in measured media on its digital-photography products from January through November 2004, and about \$260 million overall on U.S. advertising in the same period, according to Nielsen Monitor-Plus.

Post-production took 12 weeks. Hal Honigsberg of editorial house Chrome in Santa Monica, Calif., and a special-effects expert from Zoic Studios in Los Angeles were on set to make sure they had everything they needed. The trick during post-production was to make the still frames "look like a real photograph, a good photograph," Simpson says. "That's really time consuming."

In the end, the effort paid off. Both the creatives and the client say the feedback they've gotten from consumers has been greater than with any ad they've done before. "People from all ages really respond to it. That's been the biggest surprise for me," says Norman. "From my [8-year-old] daughter's friends to people that are elderly, they all know the spots, they're all pretty excited about it when they talk about it. We didn't expect that."

"We put all the responses we've gotten into a PowerPoint presentation, and it was 117 pages," says Maggie McCue, worldwide consumer advertising manager for digital photography at HP, which is based in Palo Alto, Calif. "People just sent them in saying, 'I love this commercial,' 'Give that person a raise' and 'I wasn't going to buy a camera, but I did after seeing the commercial.' ... It's an honor you guys are acknowledging the campaign, but it's sweeter to know customers [are responding like this]. It feels like we're on the next track."

Vogel will also direct the next round of the digital-photography campaign. It begins shooting this month.



PHOTO FINISH: The spots—"Relay," "Francois" and "Picture Book"—all use the same Kinks song and a technique developed by Francois Vogel that seems to capture moving pictures as photos.

