

City to become test lab

FOR ADVERTISERS

Partnership to try new campaigns here

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THE GAZETTE

Quebec is a bit of an oddity when it comes to media: it's a large North American city with global ties, yet it prefers to consume homegrown content.

To local advertising agencies, this makes it an ideal place for global brands to test out new campaigns with minimal fallout if things go awry.

That's the idea of YUL-LAB, a partnership between ad firms and media companies to attract foreign advertisers that was unveiled yesterday. The idea is simple: Montreal is cheap and self-contained, so why not take a chance with risky projects here?

"Montreal is the best place to experiment predictive ad models," said Yannick Deschênes, chief executive of the Association of Quebec Advertising Agencies, a consortium of 64 ad firms.

"Here, advertisers can learn from experience what strategies can be exportable."

The AQAA is hoping that the advertising world's bewilderment with digital marketing will spur them to take chances here. Few agencies have figured out the winning media mix to use in a world where consumers are listening less to advertisers and more to their peers online.

"How much money should brands invest in social media? No one knows. There are no benchmarks," Deschênes said.

And because there's little spillover in ad messages between Quebec and the rest of the world, failed experiments here won't be widely known.

Yesterday, cosmetics giant L'Oréal announced it will be the first to use



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YUL-LAB for an undisclosed project.

"We saw an original and innovative way to test our marketing mix," said Anik Gagnon, communications director for L'Oréal Paris.

"The market in Montreal is so multicultural. It's relevant to us be-

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ANIK GAGNON, L'ORÉAL PARIS

cause we speak to women of all languages."

Yet using Quebec as an ad Petri dish goes back two years when MasterCard did a pilot run of its interactive Web campaign in the province. The website canapasdeprix.ca asked Quebecers to add their own "priceless" experiences to an interactive map of the province. It worked, and the company expanded the idea globally with a few lessons

in its pocket.

"We learned that in order to drive consumers to a user-generated website, we needed TV support," said Lili Tomovich, the vice-president of brand marketing for MasterCard. "TV is still a primary driver of awareness. Just doing Internet and out-of-home ads aren't enough."

Paul Street, chairman of the Canadian Advertising Research Foundation, says it makes sense for global brands to test ad strategies in Montreal first.

"It's large and sophisticated and it participates in global culture in English and French selectively," he said.

"It's an interesting market that is able to cherry-pick what it wants from American culture, unlike Toronto, which is overrun with it."

At the same time, media saturation makes it inexpensive and it's close to the big decision makers on Madison Ave., he added.

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