

JWT Partners with Altai Communication in Afghanistan

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First Foray of a Multinational Agency in Afghanistan will Energize Economy and Culture for 25 Million People

NEW YORK and KABUL, Afghanistan, Jan. 30 /PRNewswire/ -- Advertising is a novel concept in Afghanistan. Years of turmoil and a state-controlled media inhibited the development of a viable marketing landscape.

But with the fall of the Taliban in 2001, an emerging market has bloomed, and true to its entrepreneurial spirit and legacy of firsts, JWT, the fourth largest advertising agency in the world, is supporting the growth of the Afghan economy and marketing opportunities through a thriving partnership with Kabul-based ad shop, Altai Communication.

This joint venture marks the first foray of a multinational agency in Afghanistan, proving JWT's pioneering vision for the potential of the industry and in the country. "After recovering from decades of conflict, Afghanistan needs economic support," said JWT Worldwide CEO Bob Jeffrey. "As the fourth largest ad agency in the world, we want to leverage our resources in rebuilding. We can contribute to the country's revitalization efforts and benefit from tapping into this nascent market. By investing in Afghanistan, we hope other companies will be inspired to join us."

New technology is exploding in the country, as well, providing eager Afghan consumers with more viable delivery channels for advertising. And since marketing venues were virtually absent in the past, the Afghan public is especially responsive to advertising. As a result, the opening of such a comprehensive ad agency will be a boon to the business economy, as well as a catalyst for much-desired cultural change within the country's budding economic and social scene.

"The private sector and foreign direct investments will fuel the Afghan economy, and the presence of an ad agency is often the first thing to attract these investments," explained Emmanuel de Dinechin, a partner at Altai. "An ad agency is a 'business infrastructure,' i.e. something necessary for companies to enter the market, develop business and build brands."

And Altai is well suited to the task of attracting business and trendsetting in the cultural marketplace. Over the last 18 months, since JWT's initial affiliation with Altai in April 2004, the company has produced award-winning creative for impressive clients. Despite the challenge of working in a post-conflict environment, Altai has succeeded in winning clients like Afghanistan International Bank, Afghan Telecom, Western Union, the United Nations, Population Services International and Afghanistan's leading mobile operator, Roshan.

A campaign developed by Altai for Roshan, was honored with the 2005 GSM Global Association award for best marketing campaign at a February ceremony in Cannes, France. It featured a national radio, TV and outdoor effort that carried the message, "Nasdiq Shodan" ("Getting closer").

The ads were first to introduce visual images of people and, most notably, women to Afghan marketing. Altai also brought the first Afghan models to the country's advertising landscape in October 2003 and the first 100-percent Afghan-made animation movie in September 2004. Additionally, Altai successfully produced a progressive brand identity for a women's contraceptive product; developed a campaign involving TV spots, a documentary and various print material to change Afghan perception of disabled people; and is currently devising a cross-media campaign to raise awareness on child trafficking across the country.

“Afghanistan is a data-free environment,” said Eric Davin, an Altai partner, “but to ensure that communications strategies are efficient, culturally sensitive and appropriate, we invest significantly in research.” Altai has developed an extensive regional network throughout the entire country, based on offices in Jalalabad, Gardez, Kandahar, Herat, Mazar-e- Sharif & Kunduz. This unique outreach allows Altai to provide province-specific data to its broad range of client, as well as implement projects and campaigns on a nationwide basis.

The agency was founded by three Frenchmen: Emmanuel de Dinechin, who formerly worked as a Consultant at Boston-based Monitor in France, the U.K. and South Africa for two-and-a-half years; Rodolphe Baudeau, who previously spent four years at L’Oreal in Paris, most recently as Marketing Manager, Mass Market Fragrances -- Gemey/Maybelline; and Eric Davin, who had served as New Media Development Manager for two years at French Web agency, Himalaya.

Baudeau and Davin headed to Afghanistan in December 2001 after the fall of the Taliban and proceeded to form a nongovernmental organization (NGO) to support independent media. De Dinechin joined the NGO the following year, after arriving in September 2002. After creating public-service campaigns for such organizations, they decided to form an agency to fulfill the marketing needs of a fledgling, but developing private sector.

Altai Communication, a branch of Altai Consulting, was registered in Afghanistan in August 2003, and provides strategic consulting, research and evaluation, and marketing communications services. Since its start, Altai has grown from five employees to 125, 25 of whom are internationals.

“Our relationship with Altai provides local expertise to our clients who want to explore marketing opportunities in Afghanistan,” said JWT Worldwide President Michael Maedel. “This gives our global clients access to yet another emerging market with a population of more than 25 million consumers.”

About JWT:

JWT, almost 142 years old, ranks as the largest advertising agency brand in the United States and as the fourth largest full-service network in the world. Its parent company is WPP.