

YOUNG AT HEART

BOB COGGINS TALKS TO **MICHAEL CULLEN** ABOUT HIS PLANS FOR HAVAS

Walk in the front door at Havas Worldwide Dublin on Leeson Street and to the left as you climb the stairs are a series of framed warrior masks on the wall. The Luchador masks denote a warrior mentality – part serious, part fun. The battle cry is brilliance, bravery and ball-breaking (own included). After all, the agency mantra is ‘Making awesome happen’.

When Bob Coggins left school, adland was far from his thoughts. Growing up on a sheep farm and guest house in Glencar, in Yeats's country in north Co Sligo, not far from the border with Leitrim, he got a job in a local Korean-owned factory which made video tape. The money was good but as he was only 17 at the time, he had to exaggerate his age a little.

He studied at the local college in Sligo before moving to Dublin, attending DIT Bolton Street where he did a cert two-year degree in transport management. As he was working his way through college he became more involved in events and marketing. He worked for Heineken (now a client for its Tiger beer and group activation projects) and *Hot Press* magazine.

He spearheaded the One Young World Summit in Dublin. Coggins replaced Pádraig Staunton at Havas when he left the agency to pursue other interests. Staunton, in turn, took over from Brian Hayes as boss at the Leeson Street agency for years known as Young Advertising. A former **DIT Students** Union president, Coggins had led Havas's Campus.ie division.

He took charge of a senior management team comprising head of client services Audrey Mills and former McConnells executive Garrett Kinsella. Tony Caravousanos is head of advertising. Peter O'Dwyer is creative director, following Judy O'Brien's decision to go freelance. With Eightytwo's move to Ogilvy, Barry Sweeney heads up digital.

Coggins encourages young people to get involved in the business. While pitching for some European business, he asked the client who she wanted brought over for the presentation. As is normal in such circumstances, the client suggested three people – himself as MD, a planner and the creative director. He asked the client if it would be okay to bring his junior planner.

Only by getting him exposure to working on pitches like that will he become better equipped to learn and rise up the ranks. It allowed him to find out about client expectations. Coggins travels a fair amount. He is just back from Los Angeles for the Havas global leadership meeting. On awards, he is a fan and believes there are two good reasons to win them.

Firstly, it makes the client look good. The other reason? To verify to the agency an idea was executed properly. Havas has a global approach to awards which essentially poses questions like: was it a good idea, did it connect, did it expose the brand to its audience and gets into how well it performed and results. Coggins plans to beef up the agency on the awards front.

He has two or three campaigns in particular which he is keen to see get recognition. IAPI's Adfx and ICAD will be a target. The Sharks? "I don't know how they're going to go," he says with some unease. "There's been a lot of controversy. Our guys weren't impressed with how the Sharks were run last year, without a shadow of a doubt. It remains to be seen."

He is impressed by IAPI and the "stellar" work done under chief executive Tania Banotti. Havas is happy to send its people on training courses. Coggins does not subscribe to the notion that there are too many agencies, rather he feels the industry follows a course where agencies get bigger and then people just up and leave to set up on their own.

Boys and Girls is a good example. In keeping with the agency's original name, Young Advertising, age-wise Havas has become younger again all of a sudden. Coggins reckons 75 per cent of the agency's 50 or so staff are younger than him. He's all of 34. The emphasis is always on hiring young talent. In keeping with that, they always have five interns on the go.



CREATIVE DUO

Aoife Kelly and Barry Sweeney. Clients include Microsoft, Valeo and its Jacob's biscuits, Hyundai, Mercedes-Benz, Irish League of Credit Unions, IRFU, MyHome.ie, Nestlé and Suntory. Given how media buying works nowadays, they have a rather loose arrangement with Havas Media, run by Graham Taylor, while doing business with other media shops.



Two of the interns are on a programme where the group's London office pay the salaries. The essential requirement here is that they must come from diverse backgrounds. So one might be a radiographer who has gone on to study marketing and digital communications and is now creating content. Of the other three interns, Coggins insists he himself vets them heavily.

He would take 60 or 70 applications and "run them through the ringer". Last time round, he only filled two of the three vacancies as he did not believe the candidates were of a high enough standard for hiring. He says the day you hire someone is the day you create more bandwidth. Havas took on eight interns full-time last year from a total of 15 new recruits.

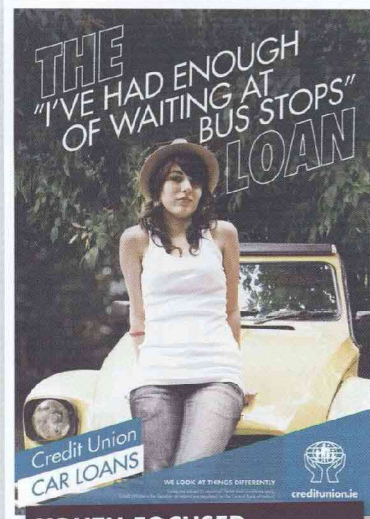
Coggins recalls a young, inexperienced but enthusiastic young man coming into the agency wanting to be hired as an intern, with ambitions to be a planner. He asked what work he had done. Had he made a TV ad, a press ad? No. He had done some experiential, shopper and social media projects. So he tells him to get around the agency and engage in lots of work.

If all they want to do is play around on Facebook all day long, they should forget it. Coggins believes the account or creative executive with five to seven years' experience is thin on the ground. They are in London, Australia or the US. They are hard to get and are expensive. Nothing is left to chance. There are no surprises. Interns are paid but must work hard.

Research which Havas Worldwide did last year shows that while everyone is more connected than ever, the downside is some people fear getting left behind and missing out. The report examines how today's always-on, 24/7 world affects how people live, work and think. It also takes a look at the way brands can help consumers get the best out of their high-speed lives.

Complaining about how busy we are has become a regular topic of discussion. Yet less than one in three respondents always have too much to do and one in five people are forever 'chasing their tail' – constantly rushing around. Just over four in 10 people admit to being sometimes to being busier than they are and 60 per cent believe other people fake busyness.

Havas put the 28 countries surveyed under three headings. The 'conflicted' are people



YOUTH FOCUSED

A press campaign which Havas created for the Irish League of Credit Unions. Bob Coggins has brought his background in college marketing to the fore at the agency. With its new website, painted wooden floors upstairs, the agency exudes a youthful vibe. Most of the staff now are under 35. Expect to see them entering for more award shows in the coming days.

most stressed between wanting to speed up and slow down. The 'entrenched' are those who see the new pace of life as something to be managed. The 'fatigued' long to return to a slower, more thoughtful way of life. It was not declared in which category most Irish people fit.

People's lives are moving so fast, every free moment is filled with technology. Irish people are like everyone else globally – always doing, working, thinking and planning to keep pace with modern demands. While many consumers say they would like their cars to be connected to the internet, less than a third want self-drive cars or affordable electric bikes.

It is no accident that Havas Dublin operates as a flat organisation. The only exception in the agency is the chief financial officer Peter

O'Brien's corner office. While not quite the old hot seating arrangement made famous by ChatlDay and HHCL, it is impossible to know who sits where. People sit next to one another not out of seniority but because they work in teams.

"Keeping it flat is key to what we do and what we learn from each other," Coggins says.

He believes there are two ways of separating agencies – talent and culture. So you have your people and you have the way clients interpret them compared to people in other agencies. When Coggins was running Campus, people asked to work with him because of his knowledge of colleges. But he knows about the need to get other colleagues on board.

"At the end of the day, we can only really depend on the relationships we develop with clients," Coggins says. "We don't have contracts. In this day and age, no one has a contract. If you have a contract, it's not worth the paper it's written on. Retainers are only rolling month to month, as long as you keep the relationship. Clients must trust you – simple.

"We must be as creative as possible," he insists. "I hear clients say 'you should challenge me' which is nonsense they heard at some marketing conference, or perhaps they read in a book. We need to challenge ourselves in here and with the client in the room when we're actively working on concepts with them so they can go away and come back with answers quickly."

Looking ahead, Havas Dublin is on a search worldwide to pick up more international business.

The network has turned the corner, winning work and being noticed by clients. There is no yearning for greatness in size, they like not being part of adland's league of behemoths. Although Havas Worldwide has 17,000 employees, its Dublin office has a challenger mentality. They avoid big pitches. Where they were last year was "a bit of a waste of time".

They pitched for the IRFU and won part of it. They had a shot at business "which would or should have naturally sat here". Coggins believes growth will come from existing clients moving brands their way and clients whose business is expanding, like Hyundai, which finished January as Ireland's top car brand with over 5,000 new 161 registrations.

Q: Are women who post selfies more likely to be happy with how they look?

To find out the answer to this and many other questions about Irish women's relationship with mobile phones, join us for breakfast in the Shelbourne Hotel (Adam & Deirdre Suite) at 7.30-10am on Wednesday, March 9.

To register, email joellen.jordan@dmgmedia.ie before 5pm on Thursday, February 25.

EVOKE.ie
As it happens. We have it.