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TOM WALSH

## Ad agency boldly hails Detroit ties

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BY TOM WALSH  
FREE PRESS COLUMNIST

Campbell-Ewald, the Warren-based advertising agency of 1,300 people, was facing a challenge very similar to the economic quandary confronting the City of Detroit and the State of Michigan.

The proud agency's history was rooted in the automobile business, specifically in Chevrolet, the General Motors Corp. brand that has been Campbell-Ewald's flagship client since 1922.

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But Campbell-Ewald yearned to be seen as more than a one-trick pony, more than just an automotive agency, just as Detroit and Michigan now seek to revive job growth by becoming less reliant on autos, our chief economic engine of the past century.

How do you position yourself as a cool, edgy, modern-thinking outfit in this post-industrial age, when your history is so tied to an iconic but old-school brand like Chevrolet and an industrial giant like GM?

"There was a tendency to eschew the Chevy relationship when we were seeking new business," said Bill Ludwig, C-E's chief creative officer, who, with CEO Tony Hopp, has led an impressive effort to diversify the client list and grow the agency during the past decade.

What Ludwig discovered, however, in attracting non-auto clients such as the U.S. Navy, the U.S. Postal Service and wireless phone upstart Alltel, was that the clients liked C-E's Midwestern work ethic.

"They told us, 'You are what you say you are and you do *more* than you say you will,'" Ludwig said.

As C-E dove into a review of its brand image a few years ago, the staff concluded its heritage of Chevy and Detroit is not a detriment, it's an advantage.

That conclusion has played out in a redesign of the agency's Web site, [www.campbell-ewald.com](http://www.campbell-ewald.com). It was launched with little fanfare a couple months ago, but has been building buzz ever since.

The home page features this statement in bold type: **"There is no substitute for industrial-strength creativity. There is no easy route to brilliance. You learn these kinds of things in a city like Detroit. Where determination and heart win out over smoke and mirrors."**

There also is a new logo, resembling a manhole cover with the agency's name, the date it was founded (1911), the word "Detroit" and an old English D with gear teeth forming the rounded edge of the D.

Another page titled "Detroit Life" -- aimed at recruiting staff to the region -- includes a rotating list of Detroit firsts: the world's first traffic light, first paved road, first city to assign phone numbers, first commercial radio station.

This place has always hummed with innovation. That's the message.

"No other city in the world has cranked out more revolutionary music," said GQ magazine in a 2005 article, quoted on the C-E site, that ranked Detroit 23rd among "62 Reasons to Love Your Country."

Michael Bernacchi, University of Detroit Mercy marketing professor, said by harkening back to a time when Detroit was king and boldly embracing its hometown heritage, Campbell-Ewald "has acted with considerable courage and creativity."

What do you think? Take a look at the site and send me your thoughts.

Contact **TOM WALSH** at 313-223-4430 or [twalsh@freepress.com](mailto:twalsh@freepress.com).

### PHOTOS

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Bill Ludwig is Campbell-Ewald's chief creative officer.

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