

WPP's AKQA and Grey form a new network model

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AKQA and Grey launch new network model - industry powerhouse offers clients outstanding creativity, innovation and brand-building at global scale

WPP's AKQA and Grey are uniting to form a new network model, AKQA Group. Grey is renowned for creative storytelling and global brand-building at scale, while AKQA is celebrated for its world-class innovation and experience design skills. With heightened demand for digital transformation and technology-driven capabilities, the combination will create a powerful new proposition for clients as a leading creative solutions company with a worldwide footprint. The AKQA Group will have 6,000 people in more than 50 countries and a blue-chip client roster that includes more than half of the Fortune 500's top 20. It will provide a full range of brand experience capabilities across all communications platforms, strengthening the skills and services of both companies for clients.

AKQA founder Ajaz Ahmed and Grey Worldwide CEO Michael Houston will partner to lead the new Group. Ahmed will become Chief Executive Officer and Houston will become Global President and Chief Operating Officer of AKQA Group. The AKQA Group will launch with the AKQA and Grey brands, which will be integrated over time into a single company based on client and market needs. The management team and creative leadership will be announced in the coming weeks, comprising leaders from AKQA and Grey.

AKQA and Grey have highly compatible creative cultures and share a common belief in the power of creativity. Between them they have won nearly 600 Cannes Lions in the last decade. The two agencies have complementary, non-competitive client rosters. The combined AKQA Group will have expertise in the media, entertainment and technology sectors as well as packaged goods, healthcare and financial services.

Ajaz Ahmed said: "Our goal is to expand horizons, combining the curiosity, ambition, imagination and pioneering spirit of a startup with the reach of a global enterprise. This is an unparalleled opportunity for AKQA and Grey to bring our shared assets to life into a modern, creatively-led company, building upon our inspiring and useful work to create value for our clients, people and communities."

Michael Houston said: "This exciting new partnership begins with what consumers expect, clients value, and brands need. Forming a new company that can deliver culture-driving ideas through technology at speed and scale is a potent proposition for our clients, large and small, and will allow us to offer the most powerful creative solutions in the industry."

Mark Read, CEO of WPP, said: "Our clients want outstanding creativity, powered by technology expertise and delivered at a global scale. This new company is designed precisely to meet those needs and is another important step forward in building our future-facing offer for clients."

Grey, named one of *Fast Company's* Most Innovative Companies, is trusted globally by clients from the fastest growing startups to leading multinationals and government agencies. Over the past five years, the agency has received top industry accolades for creative effectiveness, including: Adweek Global Agency of the Year (twice), the Grand Effie, Effie Agency of the Year, and Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity Agency of the Year with 395 Cannes Lions. Grey's growing global Health & Wellness practice counts many of the world's largest pharma and health-related companies as clients.

AKQA, recognised as a digital pioneer and a creative innovator, has won over 60 Agency of the Year awards; led Gartner's independent evaluation of Global Marketing Agencies for three years in succession; led IDC's quantitative and qualitative assessment of success in Customer Experience Design; won two Grand Prix at the most recent Cannes Lions International

Festival of Creativity; been named by Fast Company as a Best Workplace for Innovators; and achieved a consistent track record of growth since its founding.

The move follows the successful combination of other WPP agencies to create Wunderman Thompson, VMLY&R and BCW, which have been among WPP's best-performing companies by addressing client needs for more integrated, creative and technology-driven solutions.

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