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NETWORK BRAND DISAPPEARS FROM THE GERMAN MARKET

FCB Hamburg becomes Carl Nann

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The German agency market has one network brand less. The Interpublic subsidiary FCB is bidding a complete farewell to the local scene by renaming the Hamburg office, which most recently still bore its name. The company is now called Carl Nann - after the two owners Michael Carl and Christoph Nann.



The move comes as no complete surprise and was quite foreseeable after the management buyout of the operating heads two years ago, but even more so after the loss of Beiersdorf's international budget at the end of last year. Financial expert Carl and the creative Nann took over the agency in June 2018, but remained part of the international FCB network as "Affiliate Partners".

At the time, it was officially said that the agency should become more entrepreneurial and creative by taking this step and combine the best of two worlds: flexible like an owner-managed company, globally networked and capable of delivery like a network. Ultimately, however, it was the admission that FCB no longer saw any opportunities for itself in the German market. The fact that the name was formally retained was above all a signal to Beiersdorf, a long-standing and extremely important customer, which has its headquarters in Hamburg. However, after the Nivea manufacturer decided to cooperate with Publicis at the

end of 2019 and the contract with FCB expired, the business basis for the affiliate agreement with the agency of Carl and Nann no longer applies.

The separation also saves the owners the fees they had to pay for the partnership, use of the name and network tools. This had not brought them much in any case. Apart from Beiersdorf, there was no other business that they managed together. The few opportunities they had to win new mandates together remained unused. In addition, the agency developed differently. "We have developed a new culture with our own identity. And that was always more Carl Nann than FCB Hamburg," says co-head Nann. So the renaming is nothing other than the logical consequence of the development of the past years.

This apparently also applies to the new agency name. All employees were called upon to make suggestions for it and were allowed to participate in the decision-making process. In the end, the traditional version prevailed, namely to write the names of the owners on the doorplate. "Even if it seems almost anachronistic, we like the commitment that is signalled by it very much," says Nann, explaining why they chose this label and not a modern art name.

"We had to turn an administrator agency into a hunting agency again"
Christoph Nann, Carl Nann

Although the network has hardly played a role recently and has not helped the agency much, the creative director and his business partner Carl don't say a bad word about FCB. On the contrary. If you ask them about the positioning of their company, they even hold on to some parts of the heritage. This applies, for example, to certain standards and working methods. "We combine the best of two worlds: We are small and agile like a boutique agency, but we have the know-how, processes and tools of a major international agency," says Carl, co-head of commercial affairs. The company had already positioned itself in a similar way during the management buyout two years ago.

The biggest challenge in repositioning the agency was to get a different mentality into the minds of the employees. The decades of security provided by a fixed retainer contract with Beiersdorf meant that a lot of routine had been established, and here and there a certain slowness. "We had to turn an administrator agency into a hunting agency again," says co-owner Nann in a nutshell. If one believes the responsible persons, this change of mentality succeeded. Since 2018 eleven brands have been won. These include already well-known successes with companies such as Schwartauer Werke and Kölln as well as new mandates such as Hamburger Hochbahn, cheese manufacturer Hochland and South Tyrol Marketing. The agency also continues to work with Beiersdorf on individual national projects. For example, the TV spot of the Nivea campaign "[Mehr Miteinander](#)" (More Together) was created by Carl Nann.

Nevertheless, the agency has become significantly smaller. Carl Nann currently has about 40 employees. The fee turnover is about 4 million Euro. "We are on a very good path, even if profitability after a management buyout is naturally still expandable", says CFO Carl. A positive sign: The agency is working at full capacity and has so far managed to get through the Corona crisis without short-time working. The two bosses also have a lot to do as

entrepreneurs. "Less sleep, more joy", Nann and Carl personally sum up the changes for them since the company has been standing on its own two feet.

For FCB, the change of name ends a long chapter. Although the group had only been active in the local market under its own name since the 1990s, its predecessor agency Wilkens is presumably the oldest advertising agency in Germany. There is not to be a new branch. One uses the "open architecture" of the IPG holding company, which makes it possible to cooperate with the best experts of the group if necessary, a network spokeswoman informs.

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