

reader's choice

event agency spotlight: TideSmart Global



TideSmart's six-acre green campus.



BEST-IN-CLASS



The only independently owned group of specialized event marketing agencies is comprised of [↪](#)



The industry's most award-winning and respected full-service experiential marketing agency.
emg3.com

The last few years have ushered in an era of change for the industry's many event agencies. TideSmart Global has emerged as the most innovative and strategic change agent.

The harsh economic downturn of 2009 forced *most* agencies to consolidate services and halt investments in their capabilities. Slowly rebounding event budgets in 2010 pushed *most* event shops to whittle down their employee rosters. The rise of digital in 2011 put incredible pressure on *most* agencies to adopt a new competency they didn't truly understand. And the continued shift among clients in 2012, from demanding "flawless execution" to more "strategy-driven" experiential marketing programs, has made *most* former "hot" event marketing agencies virtually obsolete.

We said *most*. But not *all*.

While many agencies have been sinking, *one* has been swimming laps. From its state-of-the-art agency-owned campus just outside Portland, ME, TideSmart Global (tidesmart.com) has been growing at a triple-digit rate of expansion. The privately held group of event agencies includes the full-service and well-known experiential marketing shop **emg³**; leading sports and entertainment activation agency **Sumerian Sports and Entertainment**; best-in-class healthcare event agency **Promerica Health**; the award-winning "digital+live" **LedgePoint Digital** studio and the world's only eco-focused event marketing agency, **Viridescence**.

"It's a wonderful time to be in the experiential marketing business," says longtime industry veteran and TideSmart Global CEO and owner Steve Woods. "As the industry changes, so are we—with the only collection of specialized event agencies assembled because of client needs, *not* mergers and acquisitions."

A LITTLE HISTORY

It all began with the 2003 launch of TideSmart Global's flagship agency, emg³, a full-service experiential marketing agency offering "strategy, design, execution and measurement under one roof." The initial work was game-changing: Mobile marketing tours for Levi Strauss & Co. brought the brand directly to consumers and created lifetime relationships. Sponsorship activations for Olympus not only engaged, but also drove immediate sales spikes. In-store efforts for Walmart literally emptied store shelves, a win for both brands *and* retailers. Internal (b-to-e) pro-

grams for Lowes showed the entire industry how experiential marketing could impact employees as much as consumers. And other b-to-c campaigns for such clients as Lindt took the term "grassroots marketing" to a *whole* new level.

The industry immediately took notice, and clients flocked to emg³. "If we required revenue figures, this Portland, ME, agency might have a legitimate shot at the title of fastest-growing event agency," said the editors of Event Marketer in its inaugural It List of top 100 event marketing agencies. Since then, emg³ has won every type of industry award, grown its client base every single year and been recognized as a top place to work by multiple organizations, magazines and recognition programs.

Woods credits an interesting blend of competencies and capabilities for the success of emg³. He notes the early embrace of "strategy first" that focused all client offerings, from Day One, on solutions *before* execution. He also touts a design philosophy in which brand experiences not only have to look appropriate but also "feel" relevant. He also points to the hand-built emg³ infrastructure, which clients say gives them the "smoothest execution of any agency." And since no event campaign is successful without measurement, it's worth noting that emg³ was one of the earliest ROI pioneers, developing its own audit offerings, metrics calculations and reporting algorithms.

THE EVOLUTION CONTINUES

While emg³ was flourishing, Woods continued the evolution. He recognized that while "full-service" had its merits, many clients were demanding specialized service. "Yes, there are common elements that many event marketing campaigns share, but there are also specific elements they don't," he says. "There are several categories that each demand specialization."

Once again, he had a vision—of a group of agencies that could function collaboratively when need be but offer super-efficient specialized services to clients at all times. The result? He expanded, invested his life savings and opened TideSmart Global, the industry's first independently owned group of "specialized" event marketing agencies, a five-pack of super-shops:

FOR CEO STEVE WOODS AND TIDESMART GLOBAL, THE FUTURE EVENT AGENCY MODEL IS HAPPENING NOW—AND CLIENTS SUCH AS FORD, LOWE'S, CHEVRON, NESTLE AND LINDT ARE REAPING THE BENEFITS



The preeminent full-service sports and entertainment agency offers turnkey sponsorship services.
sumeriansports.com



The first-ever health and wellness event agency helps clients engage their targets in "health experiences."
promericahealth.com



From microsites and apps to mobile elements, social media programming and tablet engagement platforms.
ledgepointdigital.com



The only eco-event agency offers strategy and execution of "green" experiential marketing campaigns.
viridescencetour.com.com

Promerica Health. The first-ever health and wellness event agency helps clients engage consumers in “health experiences” and is engaging those targets in all 50 states (see It List write-up, pg. 84). Work includes sampling, employee health education, medical demonstrations, and mobile health tours. Promerica is also the industry’s biggest “health screening” agency. A few years ago, it worked with Walmart to create a five-vehicle program, the largest health screening tour of its kind. The shop is led by veteran healthcare, wellness and pharma marketers. **More info: promericahealth.com.**

emg³. The award-winning agency and EM reader favorite that started it all back in 2003 remains a full-service partner for clients looking for a turnkey “do it all” partner (see It List write-up, pg. 71). But emg³ also serves as execution hub for the rest of the TideSmart Global family. The event agency’s long tenure in the business, its deep infrastructure of competencies—for instance, emg³ is a Class A DOT mobile operator and handles all event staffing and routing in-house—allows it to play a fantastic supporting role for the other four TideSmart Global specialized agencies. **More info: emg3.com.**

Viridescence. The world’s only eco-event agency offers turnkey strategy, development and execution of “green” experiential marketing campaigns. The agency, one of Woods’ own labors of love at TideSmart Global, helps brands build green—or greener—event and trade show programs. From simple strategy to more elaborate program planning, execution and exhibit design and build, Viridescence is focused on activating brands in “more environmentally relevant ways.” The shop is run by some of the industry’s most respected eco-experts, who can convert event and trade show experiences to both light green and dark green. **More info: viridescence.com.**

Sumerian Sports and Entertainment. As a former NBA player-agent, sports marketing guru at Coca-Cola Co. and Miller Brewing, ATP Tennis Tournament Director, national sports columnist and current co-owner of the NBA D-League affiliate team for the Boston Celtics, Woods is ranked as one of the top sports business executives in the world and Sumerian Sports is his baby. He saw a gap between agencies specializing in sponsorship strategy and sponsorship activation—and he filled it. The full-service sports and entertainment agency offers clients turnkey sponsorship services, from property development, negotiation and contract support to activation development and execution (see It List write-up, pg. 88). As the sponsorship agency of record for Olympus, for example, Sumerian negotiated and activated the tech company’s gigantic tennis platform. For Levi’s, Sumerian brought the Signature brand to life via NASCAR. The agency is staffed by some of the best and brightest minds from sports, music, television and movies. **More info: sumeriansports.com.**

LedgePoint Digital. While many event agencies outsource the digital layer of live programs, TideSmart went against the grain by opening its own digital studio. LedgePoint offers web services, technology development, design and programming: From microsites and apps to mobile elements, social media programming and tablet engagement platforms. LedgePoint offers up a combination “design and programming” menu, which allows clients to leverage its group of technologists for both hardware and software. **More info: ledgepointdigital.com.**

THE NEW AGENCY MODEL

Clients say the model is ingenious. “Experiential marketing is unique,” says Woods. “It requires collaboration with people who have individual skills and collaborative expertise.” Which is why each TideSmart agency is run by teams with specific expertise in each segment, but also backed up by emg³ execution. “I haven’t seen this offered by any other event agency,” agreed Woods. “Many agencies purport that they have a full menu of services, but in every one of those systems there are inefficiencies with multiple overheads, margins and infrastructures. We have multiple resources with common efficiencies. By sharing emg³ as an execution hub, we’ve created a hyper-efficient group of agencies with which clients get extreme specialized expertise and the lowest cost basis of any agency.”

Woods knew that to create a truly collaborative group of best-in-class agencies, he’d need to design an environment that would bring to life the vision. And so in a unique move never seen before in the event industry, Woods broke ground and developed a six-acre corporate campus housing the five shops as well as a 100,000-cubic-foot logistics facility, training center and meeting space. The “collaborative” design of the campus facilitates more efficient and effective account management. And the entire footprint is LEED-qualified to the most efficient energy and environmental standards. TideSmart is officially the only fully green, solar-powered agency campus in the country.

“When clients come here, they see our solar-powered campus, green engineering, an eco-friendly logistics center, state-of-the-art HD radio and video facility, a health center, a green roof and hydroponic garden,” says Woods. “They see our commitment to the environment, our people—and their brands. Our approach is unique. It comes from a spirit—we’re proud to have the lowest employee turnover in the entire event industry.”

Indeed, TideSmart is on the cutting-edge of the industry, with specialized offerings and integrated services. Woods and his team continue to tout the culture, the people—and their long-time pride in remaining independent, a move Woods says provides “better service to clients 365 days a year.” Next up? The evolution continues for the continually growing client base and the TideSmart Global menu of services.

“Most agencies have inefficient overheads. Using strategic organizational redundancy, there’s a better way to create efficiency.”

STEVE WOODS
CEO/OWNER
TIDESMART
GLOBAL





TideSmart's specialized structure brings the best strategy and shared execution under one roof, a win-win combination for brand marketers.



To take a look for yourself, visit tidesmart.com. To join the next client tour of the TideSmart campus, reach out to woodss@tidesmart.com for the schedule.