

How ‘positioning’ helped Innis Maggiore reach 50th anniversary



‘They’ve always been on the leading edge.’ Innis Maggiore celebrates 50 years

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JACKSON TWP. – Dick Maggiore’s office shelves are full of sales and marketing books and binders labeled for area businesses.

“I always felt I was behind in this business, so I kept reading,” he said.

The co-founder of Innis Maggiore started the full-service advertising agency 50 years ago this August with his stepdad, the late Chuck Innis, at their Blake Avenue home. Maggiore had a degree in psychology, and Innis was vice president of sales and marketing at Caxton Press.

“He thought he could produce artwork better than the other agencies,” Maggiore said.

So, the two of them hired an artist, and the business was born. Today, the agency with 32 full-time employees describes itself as the “nation’s leading brand positioning agency” — a tagline inspired and endorsed by author and advertising executive Jack Trout.



Innis Maggiore, an advertising agency located in Jackson Township, is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. Kevin Whitlock / Massillon Independent

‘This is the answer that I’ve been looking for.’

The agency grew and found its niche in the 1980s with a shift from creative-led work to “positioning” strategy.

Maggiore would visit a Belden Village bookstore or the library every few weeks to get books on marketing and advertising. He thought there could be more to the industry than clever headlines and attention-grabbing photos.

In 1981, he read “Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind” by Jack Trout and Al Ries. It made him realize that every product or service has to stand for one idea to differentiate itself from the competition, and that has to guide the creative work.

“To me, it was the Holy Grail,” Maggiore said. “This is the answer that I’ve been looking for.”

As president of the Canton Advertising Club in the mid-1980s, Maggiore brought in Trout as a guest speaker. They formed a lifelong relationship centered around the positioning concept, and Trout’s 2008 book “In Search of the Obvious” is dedicated to Maggiore.

“Imagine having the right strategy and great creative,” Maggiore said. “That’s a one-two punch, and I think that’s what’s really propelled us to where we are today.”



Jeff Monter, principal of key accounts at Innis Maggiore in Jackson Township, works on a campaign at the advertising agency, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. Kevin Whitlock / Massillon Independent

Innis Maggiore evolved through the years

Maggiore became the ad agency's president in 1989. As technology progressed, the business "evolved quickly" and created its first website for Republic Steel in 1994, said current President Mark Vandegrift.

While working with Trout, the agency was hired by Microsoft to help the company compete with AOL in the early 2000s. Maggiore said the business is prepared to embrace artificial intelligence (AI) as it did the internet.

"We think of AI as an assist to what we do," he said.

AI is present in platforms that the company uses, such as Google Ads and WordPress. Innis Maggiore also uses generative AI to research various topics.

Vandegrift, who became president last year and has been with the agency for about 26 years, said each customer receives a custom solution.



Mark Vandegrift, president of Innis Maggiore, talks about the Jackson Township company's 50-year anniversary. *Kevin Whitlock / Massillon Independent*



Dick Maggiore, co-founder and CEO of Innis Maggiore, right, talks about a BellStores advertisement that Jeff McMahan, senior account supervisor, is working on at the agency. *Kevin Whitlock / Massillon Independent*

As a full-service agency, Innis Maggiore has traditional and digital media capabilities.

“There’s all forms of the way people go to market, and we have to be flexible to that,” he said. “There’s not one size fits all.”

Vandegrift also recognized the rarity of having a company founder around that long. Maggiore was 19 when the business began and will be 69 by the anniversary date of Aug. 14.

The Innis Maggiore office at 4715 Whipple Ave. NW will host a celebration for staff and community partners to coincide with its anniversary in August.

‘They’ve always been on the leading edge’

Custom Auto Body in Jackson Township has been Innis Maggiore’s longest client — since 1979, when Maggiore convinced founder Ron Tietze to hire the agency instead of handling advertising on his own.

Randy Tietze, president of Custom Auto Body, said his father soon saw the value of that decision. The elder Tietze took a risk in 1987 by investing an entire year’s advertising budget in one billboard campaign. But that billboard featured an inflatable shaped like the front of a car, which would deflate to resemble a crash, and then be re-inflated every 30 seconds.

It was featured on Cleveland television news, in trade publications and in an advertising textbook. Randy Tietze said it propelled the auto shop’s business.

“That proved to Ron [Tietze] the importance and their ingenuity and knowhow to make that work and make it all come together,” he said. “That sold Ron right there.”

Custom Auto Body is in its 63rd year of business and hasn’t ever considered another advertising agency, Randy Tietze said. Innis Maggiore has provided the shop with new and engaging marketing ideas for decades.



The inflated Custom Auto Body billboard from 1987. *Submitted*



The deflated Custom Auto Body billboard from 1987. *Submitted*

“They’ve always been on the leading edge,” he said.

Midwest Industrial Supply, a Canton- based manufacturer of dust control, soil stabilization and other products, began working with Innis Maggiore about 15 years ago. CEO Bob Vitale, who founded the company in 1975, said he wanted to undertake a “re-positioning” of Midwest and engaged the agency because of its expertise with that concept.

They identified the markets Midwest serves and its “unique value” before crafting a new website and marketing materials. The company has continued to work with Innis Maggiore on its messaging.

“Over their 50 years of experience, they have been applying the principles of positioning in a disciplined, rigorous way that simply enables each of its clients to effectively, ultimately, make the competition irrelevant or to enable clients, customers like us, to break through the clutter that is in the marketplace and get into our customers’ minds with a message that resonates,” Vitale said.

A more recent client, the Akron-based Babcock & Wilcox, started working with Innis Maggiore in 2021 for a website redesign. Its website has since won two awards, and the energy company has continued to work with the ad agency on digital campaigns and video and art creation.

“They are experts in brand management and market positioning,” said Wendy Easterling with Babcock & Wilcox. “I’m a global marketing director and I’ve worked with agencies all over the world, and they are by far heads-and-shoulders the best I’ve ever worked with — and they’re here in Northeast Ohio in our own backyard.”



Cheryl Henderson, creative director at Innis Maggiore, works on a Smith's social media account. *Kevin Whitlock / Massillon Independent*

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