

Blue 449 has been named as a Best Place to Work in Indiana company for the first time – and struck gold at No. 1 in the large category.



BLUE 449

By Charlee Beasor

To access the bright, modern downtown Indianapolis offices of Blue 449, one passes by the rough texture of the exposed brick of buildings constructed in the late 1800s and under the curved archways of a past architectural era.

A mix of contemporary and traditional embodies the essence of Blue 449, an open source media company. It is continuing to evolve in a changing advertising and media industry, but with a breadth of knowledge and years of experience under its belt.

In various iterations, Blue 449 has been operating in the capital city for decades. The company was previously known as Optimedia, and is one of the five brands of Publicis Media, the media arm of worldwide

parent company Publicis Groupe.

A rebranding in late 2016 to Blue 449 brings the company to its “intersection of creativity and ideas and innovation with technology and science and data,” according to Jay Schemanske, vice president and director of strategic communications.

“The data and science and precision that we apply to some of our investment strategies is very data driven. There is increasing pressure on marketers for return on



Media Company 'Striving for Perfection'

investment, and we take that very seriously. We are quantifying that result in tracking consumers," he conveys.

Power of the people

The name Blue 449 serves as an internal challenge. A "true" blue on the color spectrum is 450 nanometers. Continually striving for perfection is a motivator, Schemanske says.

"Being just one digit shy of that (450) signifies our aspiration to test ourselves, improve ourselves. Not only in our achievement of success with our clients, but also as people. Ones that care for each other, ones that collaborate with each other and the way we do



The downtown Indianapolis office offers collaborative environments and a kitchen with work space for a change of pace for the company's 20 local associates.

business with each other, as well as the way we give back and the way we participate in our communities," he observes.

The emphasis on people is all encompassing. Schemanske asserts a talented staff is one of the reasons Blue 449 has been successful in attracting and retaining major clients. The company's culture highlights three "T" components: trust, talent and transformation.

"Without a doubt, talent leads all of that. Talent leads trust and intellect leads the transformation, so it spearheads it all. It is a byproduct of the people," he relays.

This is the first time Blue 449 has been named one of the Best Places to Work in Indiana (the New York office was named to that state's version of the program this year as well). There are 20 associates in Indianapolis and over 360 nationally in the company's seven U.S. offices.

"We put a lot of emphasis on people. Our staff is truly the most important part of what we do, and why we do what we do," Schemanske emphasizes. "We go to great effort to create an environment where we care for each other, and we care for our clients' business. That manifests itself in sharing workload and sharing ideas.

"We firmly believe if we have fun together, laugh together, smile together that we're stronger together. One of the company lines is that 'none of us is as good as all of us.' We find that to be very, very true. Teamwork is important to how we get work done, but also to how we grow professionally."

Now hiring

Blue 449 is seeking to grow its employee base, with a focus on diversity and inclusion.

Schemanske acknowledges changing demographics around the world demand more diverse workplaces and bodies of work to "bring advertising as an industry to those which historically have not been a strong draw."

Weston de Raismes, an assistant planner at Blue 449, moved to Indianapolis about 18 months ago from Florida. He had never been to the state before and didn't know anyone here. Indianapolis associates made him a map of places to look for housing and welcomed him to the Blue 449 family.



Among the advantages of being a small office with the resources of a major company: an enviable benefits package and a company culture that is close-knit and family-like, as employees enjoy spending time together and helping in the community.

"Everybody was so nice and welcoming. It was a pleasant experience," he conveys. "I'm an assistant, so I'm constantly learning from others. There's so much to learn and once you think you've got it, there's something new. Some new technology comes up."

de Raismes leads Égalité, a committee for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) employees and allies. There are eight Indianapolis team members involved in the

group, which participates in various community service activities and events, and serves as a networking opportunity. The Égalité group is just one of Publicis Groupe's many business resource alliances.

"It's a great form of diversity and inclusion," he adds.

While there is an emphasis on hiring now, promoting from within is also paramount for Blue 449.

Lana Wombolt, a planner, has been promoted through the company over the seven years she's been there. Moving among offices within the company is common as well. She recalls three associates from Indianapolis taking promotions to work in Seattle several years ago.

"If there wasn't an opportunity in Indianapolis, there might be an opportunity in Seattle or New York or San Francisco," she notes.

Schemanske adds, "We call that fluid talent. We actively announce and share with each other job opportunities across the entire company. We see ourselves as a unified company and there are very real and frequent opportunities."

How sweet it is

Not just alluding to the candy station that is fully stocked with treats for a tasty nibble during the day, the company's benefits package and perks are sweet too.

Unique policies include an extended parental leave (six weeks of disability, plus two additional weeks gifted to new parents), a transition to work program for parents to come back on a part-time basis after the birth of a child, as well as adoptive parent benefits.

The Blue 449 office amenities include a wellness room (that doubles as a nap room or a mother's room) with a treadmill desk and access to a kitchen complete with a high-end coffee and hot beverage machine.



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In the heart of the office are pillars adorned with sheets of paper taped up announcing the betting pools to guess the name or birth weight of expected babies.

Sliding glass doors show who is in the office and emphasize the “door is always open” feel.

“Third Thursdays” allow employees to knock off early for the day and gather with co-workers for appetizers and drinks. A monthly beer cart also makes its rounds in the office, and catered meals and summer outings are regular occurrences.

But the camaraderie and culture of the Indianapolis branch isn’t simply derived from agreeable benefits.

Open-air meeting places and workstations (sometimes awash in neon orange glow from the Hooters restaurant sign just outside the windows) allow for teamwork and collaboration.

“It’s very open in terms of asking someone else, ‘Hey, I really need help with this, can you help work on this with me?’,” Wombolt contends. “That’s not just in this office, but there’s a team in New York that assists us as well. There are many resources we can go to.”

Elizabeth Mann, vice president for Blue 449, who has been with the company 15 years, acknowledges that the type of people who want to work in advertising are often passionate personalities.

“It’s a hard job we do sometimes. There are lots of hours, demands and deadlines. You have to have a certain passion for the work to be able to do that,” she notes. “The company is great at realizing you have to have a person who is passionate for the work, but they also have passions in their outside life that are just as important.”

Mann and Wombolt both gave birth to children days apart and supported each other through the major life changes.

“The biggest thing I like about the company is people. I have friends here, not just co-workers. Elizabeth was visiting me when I had my baby and she’s coming to my house and we have playdates for the kids. It’s so nice not to just have a professional relationship, but a personal one too,” Wombolt expresses.

“That’s what keeps me here, and the work itself, I just find it fun. There’s always something new; you never quite have it down. There’s just one more thing that pops up.”

Shout it out loud

Acknowledging good work and peer success is key for Dave Ehlers, CEO of Blue 449 US and Publicis Media Canada.

Schemanske recently attended a meeting with executives from around the country and was congratulated numerous times for the Best Places to Work in Indiana designation.

“That was evidence of our CEO chiming in and singing the praises and pride. And talent leads, and it’s the people,” he declares.

When good news is at hand, it is shared companywide via Twitter and other communication methods. On a more local level, the Blue 449 spirit box allows for peer recognition.

“Anybody can go and put a piece of paper in and thank somebody for whatever they’ve done. In our monthly staff meetings, we pick one and that person gets a prize. But we read all those aloud and clap for everybody,” Mann explains.

Wombolt adds, “There are times I’ve been here late and its dinnertime and someone says, ‘Hey, let us know what you want for dinner.’ We have lunches brought in every other Wednesday. Just the (idea of) ‘We’ll feed you.’ It helps.”

Community service is also important – whether through its business resource groups like Égalité, or by packing or distributing food at Gleaners Food Bank, painting at a local school or helping with organizations such as the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

The small touch of a close-knit office and the resources of a large company enable continual learning and keep the work fresh and exciting, Mann says.

“There’s always opportunities to work with different clients and use your brain in a different way. It keeps people motivated and interested. I’ve never heard anyone say they’re bored. I’ve been here a long time, I haven’t gotten bored,” she offers. “There’s always more to learn.”

RESOURCES: Blue 449 at www.blue449.com