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## Agency pairing heralds "a big idea"

By Stuart Elliott

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A New York agency that specializes in theatrical advertising is joining forces with a similar shop in London, a deal that points to the growing interest in entertainment marketing.

SpotCo, the New York agency, has agreed to be acquired by a British company, the First Artist Corporation, which owns Dewynters, the London shop. Financial terms of the deal, scheduled to be announced on Monday, are not being disclosed.

The two agencies will remain separate and operate as autonomous units of First Artist, which also has divisions devoted to sports marketing, event management and sponsorship consulting.

SpotCo, which opened in 1997, has 60 employees who create campaigns for Broadway shows like "August: Osage County," "Avenue Q," "Chicago," "In the Heights" and "Rent." Other clients include Cirque du Soleil, Radio City Music Hall and the New York Botanical Garden.

Dewynters is known for ads for shows like "Cats," "Les Misérables," "Mamma Mia!" "Mary Poppins," "Miss Saigon" and "The Phantom of the Opera." The agency, which has 94 employees, has enjoyed long relationships with the composer Andrew Lloyd Webber and the producer Cameron Mackintosh. Dewynters, which also works for cultural institutions like Covent Garden and the Royal Opera House, was founded in 1976 and traces its roots to an agency that was started in 1872.

Dewynters and SpotCo have collaborated on campaigns for shows like "Avenue Q" and "Chicago," which began in one country and were subsequently mounted in the other.

The shows have become "global entertainments," said Drew Hodges, the founder, president and director for creative services at SpotCo. "A show could go from London to New York to Australia to

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Berlin to Toronto."

As a result, shows "need a big idea" that can appeal to ticket-buyers anywhere, Hodges said. At the same time "they need to be thought about in terms of how they can work in each individual market," he added.

In other words, he said, "think globally, act locally" is advice that works as well for theatrical producers as it does for producers of packaged goods or other consumer products.

Anthony Pye-Jeary, managing director at Dewynters, echoed his new colleague's opinion.

"It's such a small world now," Pye-Jeary said in a telephone interview from London.

"When a show comes across, we sometimes tweak the American logo here, and in New York they sometimes tweak one of ours," he added. "But it's the same brand."

For many clients, "we go around the world with them, which has been fantastic," Pye-Jeary said. Years ago, an agency that created a campaign for a show would send a style bible to the agencies responsible for the ads for subsequent stagings in other markets, he added, but now "for a show like 'Mamma Mia!' we have a person here who concentrates on international productions."

The sale of SpotCo means that the two principal New York agencies specializing in theatrical campaigns are now both owned by marketing conglomerates. The other agency, Serino Coyne, was acquired by the Omnicom Group in 2003.

Serino Coyne and Dewynters have worked together on campaigns for Lloyd Webber/Mackintosh shows like "Cats" and "Les Misérables." Dewynters "will still work with Serino Coyne" after the acquisition of SpotCo by First Artist, Pye-Jeary said, and SpotCo will still work with London agencies other than Dewynters.

"We'll run our companies in the same way we always have," he added, "but we will have the strength of knowing what they're doing before we would have heard about it, and vice versa."

Pye-Jeary and Hodges met when collaborating on ads for the production of "Chicago" that was mounted in London after opening in New York.

"When it came over here, the producer said, 'I'd like to use the same design as in New York,' " Pye-Jeary recalled.

"It was a very strong brand that Drew created," he added. First Artist acquired Dewynters in 2006 for £15.5 million (\$29.5 million). Hodges said he had been approached "on occasion" about selling SpotCo before he and First Artist began talking.

"They wanted to buy us just to buy us," he said of other potential acquirers, whereas First Artist is the parent of an agency that has "a culture similar to ours, a buzz similar to ours."

"When you're trying to get people to buy a ticket for a show that hasn't opened, what we and Dewynters create is an idea that is visceral, something people can feel," Hodges said, "which is how they decide if a show is for them before there's a show."

For decades, theatrical agencies relied primarily on traditional tactics like newspaper ads and posters to stimulate ticket sales; adding television commercials to the mix was considered a breakthrough. But like other marketers, theatrical producers are now encouraging their agencies to develop ads for new media.

For example, SpotCo recently created a campaign for the offbeat musical "Xanadu" that was centered on so-called viral videos, which appeared on Web sites like YouTube. The humorous clips featured a fictional character, Cubby Bernstein, along with Broadway stars like Nathan Lane and Patti LuPone.

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