

Jay Wolff and Richard Lent on...

# Join the conversation

Odopod's Jay Wolff and AgencyNet's Richard Lent explain how you can play your part in The Society of Digital Agencies

**The founding members of The Society of Digital Agencies (SoDA) met in March 2007 under simple terms: meet your most respected peers and competitors, talk openly, and be transparent. It's easy to say, though difficult to live up to, but it worked. We felt that by helping one another, we'd develop ideas to lift the entire industry.**

A total of 17 agencies from around the US attended that first ad-hoc gathering in Miami and have since bonded together, raised funding and launched this industry association.

In the first 18 months, we elected a board, developed an operational structure for coordination and scale, and through an invitation-only process, have grown to 41 members. We've expanded globally, with member agencies in Brazil, Russia, Australia, France and the UK and attracted agencies from boutique creative shops to AOR-level operations. The expertise of our members is broad, stretching from digital brand building to software platform development to search.

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The group's mission statement is to provide "the voice of digital marketing professionals", and share in "a mission to advance the industry through best practices, education and advocacy".

We're taking on challenges that confront most companies in our nascent industry: the competing demands of innovation and liability, enhancing the talent pool, securing proper credit for digital work, and crippling contract terms – such as serial liability – that strip viability from the business itself.

## Developing standards

We all face an increasingly complex landscape, along with a rapid shift of digital strategy to the centre of all marketing. Additionally, digital agencies that serve as trusted resources for traditional agencies are challenged by a gap in understanding and unrealistic expectations. By bringing captains of industry together, we develop standards and practices to benefit the industry.

One of the key contributions we've made so far has been the SoDA unConference, a hosted business conversation among agency owners and peers, which has proved informational and, we've been told, inspiring. Set in a casual format involving audience participation, we've hosted events this year in parallel with the regular sessions at Adobe's MAX, SXSW, and the OneShow.

The message that we repeat is "join the conversation". We're focused on the business side of the business, which we know many agency leaders crave. We address topics such as 'How is your business affected by the current economic situation? How can we work together to advance the industry? What are the biggest issues you're confronting? How can we enable mutual success?'

Through the support of our partner, Adobe, and other event sponsors, we're able to widen our reach and bring industry heads together in an environment where everybody benefits. This year, we'll host more regional events designed to demonstrate our unofficial motto: "Share a little, gain a lot", which will be open to any agency owner or executive in the area.

As one of our key pillars, we focus on improving the talent pool that benefits us all. Each year, Adobe brings together educational leaders who craft programmes for teaching creative and digital skills, and SoDA provides their group with a channel for communicating with the industry.

Our first coordinated 'win' from this alliance comes from an agreement among SoDA members to draw up a consistent set of agency roles and job descriptions that educators can design their curriculum against. Our hope is that by providing consistency across an otherwise entrepreneurial, inconsistent and rapidly evolving space, this will advance the curriculum for digital skills worldwide.

There are several ways to get involved. First, we've launched [sodaspeaks.ning.com](http://sodaspeaks.ning.com), where members openly host conversations about the most pressing issues in our industry. Second, sign up for SoDA's unConferences. And third, for additional SoDA events in your region, follow @sodaspeaks on Twitter, and find the SoDA staff online on Facebook or LinkedIn. We're excited to have you join the conversation! ●

*Richard Lent is founder and CEO of AgencyNet and is the chairman of SoDA ([www.sodaspeaks.com](http://www.sodaspeaks.com)). Jay Wolff is president of Odopod in San Francisco and currently serves as vice chairman.*