

ADWEEK

This Behind-the-Scenes 'Silicon Valley' Story Will Make Every Digital Agency Jealous

Wpromote's unlikely cameo helped
land new accounts By [Christopher Heine](#)

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Richard Hendricks (Thomas Middleditch) at the agency in a scene from Silicon Valley HBO

Even after 15 years of being in business, not many people had heard of Wpromote because, like most search advertising agencies, it operates in stealth mode for high-profile clients such as Toyota and Marriott. Though last winter, a decision by Mike Judge—the critically acclaimed showrunner who was developing the third season of his HBO comedy Silicon Valley—flipped the script on the company's incognito existence and rendered it a part of TV trivia for years to come.

It all started with the El Segundo, Calif.-based firm's founder and CEO Mike Mothner, who serves on a local development committee. An [HBO](#) location scout asked the committee for recommendations for a "hip, tech-looking ad agency," and Mothner, knowing how many of his employees were Silicon Valley fans, jumped at the opportunity. A few emailed photos later, Judge swung by to check out the space. "He loved it," Mothner said.

The arrangement was supposed to be pretty straightforward. Wpromote would get paid a chunk of change for letting the show's crew shoot on its premises. Its execs were looking forward to the fun of watching the crew take over their office for a day and, more than likely, put up a sign with a fake, mock-tech agency name. "Usually they anonymize the company offices they film in because they are supposed to be the offices of fictional groups in the show," Mothner pointed out.



The episode, called Daily Active Users, aired on June 19, and, suddenly, Wpromote was anything but under the radar. A humorous Reddit thread popped up, hypothesizing that Wpromote's actual website was also fictional and part of an elaborate act of marketing chicanery. Thanks to the buzz, the company's website traffic jumped 101 percent compared to the week before, with Google searches for "Wpromote" skyrocketing by 124 percent. Then, the phone started ringing off the hook, and Wpromote signed seven new clients, including retailers Forever 21 and RVCA, in a matter of weeks. While Wpromote execs also credit their sales team with closing the new business, the company's Hollywood moment obviously was a plus.

The high-profile exposure "also will deliver longer-term benefits such as making Wpromote a more attractive destination for job seekers," noted marketing consultant David Deal.

It was a great morale booster, too. Forty-five employees expressed interest in participating in the shoot, and a lottery system was used to select the 15 who got to go on set. The staffers appeared in scenes as receptionists and passersby carrying a beverage, a yoga mat and other props. Stephanie Port, Wpromote's director of small-to-medium businesses, who was one of the lucky extras, recalled some off-camera watercooler chatter with Middleditch.

"[He] stood in front of us and improvised a little bit of stand-up to get in character," Port said. "It was hilarious—he's a very funny guy."

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