

AdAge

Former Progressive CMO Jeff Charney Debuts New Marketing Venture

Mkhstry is an invitation-only collective



"It's part accelerator lab for ideas, part agency catalyst and part purpose-driven lifestyle brand—it's not as simple as an ad agency."

• • •

March 30, 2022



Credit: MKHSTRY

Nearly three months after retiring from Progressive, Jeff Charney is back—with his own advertising venture. Called Mkhstry, the business is a nationwide collective that plans to work with clients on an invitation-only basis. The collective will work with companies and brands as well as agencies, Charney said.

"It's part accelerator lab for ideas, part agency catalyst and part purpose-driven lifestyle brand—it's not as simple as an ad agency," he said. The company is focusing on "idea-first marketing" rather than leading work with campaigns.



Credit: Jeff Charney

Mkhstry, which counts Cleveland-based innovation lab Nottingham Spirk as a partner, plans to use its own proprietary index, a 75-question pre-screening of potential clients to explore the best options for a business relationship. Charney said he will work with clients on guiding them through new areas of advertising including blockchain, the creator economy and Web3. In terms of clients, he expects to initially target industries such as education, blockchain and cryptocurrency and health and wellness.

As a collective, the company will bring on partners to serve clients in an as-needed basis rather than have full-time employees. Mkhstry will not have an office but will operate virtually, “eliminating the heavy overhead normally associated with a traditional agency or consultancy,” according to a press release.

In addition, a portion of Mkhstry’s profits will go to Little Free Library, a nonprofit focused on books and education.

With Progressive as chief marketing officer for nearly a dozen years,

Charney has long been known for his marketing prowess.

He built the insurer’s in-house agency Ninety6, which served as a model for the industry long before internal agencies were a trend. He was also responsible for well-liked spokes characters such as Flo, Jamie, and more recently, the life-coach Dr. Rick.

Eventually, Charney expects to expand Mkhstry into a lifestyle offering that includes branded hoodies and t-shirts.