

# Visceral Aims to Shape Brands While Shaping a Better World

## TECH: B2B Design and Development Services Target Cause-Based Groups

■ By SARAH DE CRESCENZO

Ten years ago, programmer **Jay Buys** was spending his professional hours building **Facebook** apps that could sell ringtones for a big public relations firm.

"It was fun, but I thought: 'what's the point of this?'" he said.

In 2006, he and a co-worker, **Matthew Billingsley**, decided to launch their own marketing firm, offering design and development services, mostly to business-to-business companies.

They moved the company, called **Visceral LLC**, in 2011 to San Diego and formalized it, opening an office and hiring the company's first employee.

"We transitioned from two guys who freelanced together with a DBA to a real company," said Buys, Visceral CEO.

It was while they were doing freelance work in D.C. that Buys and Billingsley, Visceral's chief creative officer, discovered what would become the company's bread and butter: nonprofit and other similarly cause-based organizations.

Organizations such as the **Juvenile Diabetes Foundation** and the **Wildlife Conservation Network** have turned to the firm to design and develop online tools to increase support for their fundraising and awareness efforts.



Photo courtesy of Visceral LLC  
The team collaborates on a project.

The men found satisfaction in working with clients whose profession was also their passion.

"We really found our calling here," Buys said.

### Certified B Corporation

As it marked its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, Visceral has announced publicly its intention to double down on its dedication to helping others — while turning a profit — by becoming a Certified B Corporation, a for-profit company that has pledged to take other factors, in addition to profit, into its decision-making, including its impact on society, its employees and the environment.

Becoming one of about a dozen B Corps in San Diego comes as Visceral is making a concerted effort to become a bigger player in the community, Buys said.

The company maintains clients outside of the city, especially in D.C. where it was established, but Buys said his team's interest in becoming more involved in the San Diego community has spurred it to become more proactive in marketing the firm.

Earlier this year, Visceral published

## VISCERAL LLC

**CEO:** Jay Buys

**Founded:** 2006 (established locally in 2011)

**Employees:** 15

**Headquarters:** San Diego

**Revenue:** \$810,000 in 2014

"Repurpose: Be Good At What You Do & Do Something Good," a book about the agency's formation written by San Diego-based writer **Sarah Beauchemin**.

Visceral is among a number of local businesses that work mainly with the nonprofit community.

San Diego's Gaslamp District has become a hot spot for businesses that work with nonprofits, said **Matt Cromwell**, head of support at San Diego-based **WordImpress**, a team of professional **WordPress** developers.

WordImpress, which launched about two years ago, designs plugins for nonprofits, some of which Visceral has used in the websites it has designed.

Broadly speaking, San Diego is home to "a lot of grassroots nonprofit activity," from tiny volunteerism groups to larger charity organizations, Cromwell said.

Buys said he found the city a collaborative, friendly place when he visited on Memorial Day weekend six years ago — and that his impression of San Diego during that trip spurred Visceral's relocation from D.C.

Since then, as the company has grown — revenue rose more than 60 percent between 2012 and 2014, from \$510,000 to

\$810,000 — Buys said Visceral practices what it preaches for other companies inside its own.

Employees get health benefits and the company matches 401K contributions.

The office has craft beer on tap; a nearly, formal-looking conference table converts to a pool table.

"I'm a firm believer that your job shouldn't be something you dread," Buys said. "We're not trying to build an app to conquer the world; we want to help clients and have fun doing it."

### Strategic Decisions

At any given time, Visceral is working on about five projects; its roster typically includes 30 to 40 clients yearly.

While Visceral's main pitch is its expertise in digital communications, Buys said the company often finds itself helping its clients with strategic decisions, too.

The agency, for example, convinced the Wildlife Conservation Network that its online donation platform should allow donors to give funds to support efforts on behalf of a specific wild animal, because people are more likely to give if they can picture exactly how their money will help.

Visceral has also worked with organizations that are as interested in sharing the work they do as they are in raising money, such as **Schmidt Ocean Institute**, established in 2009 by **Wendy** and **Eric Schmidt**, executive chairman of **Google**, to advance oceanographic research.

But while it aims to become better known, Visceral has no plans to break with the premise that underlies how it does business, Buys said: "If you do good work and win your business in ethical and honest ways, the work will come."



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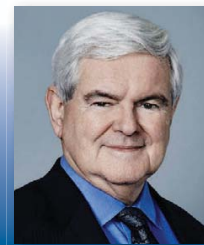
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