

Making a Difference

Driving Growth

An Interview with
Chris Clarke, Founder, Pure Growth Group

EDITORS' NOTE In 2011, Chris Clarke founded Pure Growth Group. In 2015, he co-founded a line of youth-focused sunscreen products called Pure Sun Defense. In 2016, he co-founded Pure Growth Organic. Prior to founding Pure Growth Group, Clarke founded Pure Creative. He founded Nitro in Shanghai in 2001. In 2009, after being the most-awarded agency in the world, Nitro merged with Sapient, creating SapientNitro.



Chris Clarke

COMPANY BRIEF Pure Growth Group (pure-growth.com) creates and advises businesses that change the status quo. Pure is the parent company of Pure Growth Consultancy, a growth-led advertising, brand, and innovation company; and of Pure Ventures, a division designed to build and grow sustainable businesses.

What did you see in the market that made you feel there was an opportunity for Pure Growth?

Being able to understand and predict how the market is changing has played a large part in the success of all my companies. When I built Pure Creative, instead of brands talking to people, we gained attention with ideas designed to get people talking about them. We started doing this kind of highly effective communications before the industry was doing anything like it and before there was a common understanding of how it worked.

In 2000, I realized digital media was going to transform the market so I created Nitro to deliver the right combination of digital and brand thinking. Today, we take it for granted, but at the time many people questioned me for taking the approach. I was fortunate to attract great clients like Mars and Nike who helped make it work, building the company into a global network and merging to become SapientNitro, which was ultimately acquired by Publicis for \$3.7 billion.

When creating Pure Growth, I combined my knowledge of building global businesses with my understanding of how to truly create a connection between consumers and the brands they purchase. When we look at brands and at growth, we look at it in a different way. Today, it is so much more than traditional advertising and fighting for return on investment. Driving brand growth means creating content that bonds with consumers in a meaningful way.

It's about changing the way consumers think and feel about the brands they buy and includes anything from creating our own products to working with our clients to drive growth. That could be anything from making a music video with Zedd and Aloe Blacc for M&Ms to long-form and short-form bloggers to creating new partnerships we can promote. That is the interesting part, and I don't think the industry has jumped on that yet.

Is there an understanding among brands that they can take that approach and it will drive revenue?

We have seen a great deal of success with this approach for our clients, but after a career of seeing big companies struggle to innovate, we decided to build our own brand. I believe brands have a responsibility to inspire consumers to live better, and with this in mind, we developed Pure Growth Organic Food. We worked with Walmart to create a product that is not only as affordable as its conventional snack competitors, but that also tastes better. It is criminal that not all people can afford healthy, organic food, and now shoppers can find this nationwide at Walmart and soon at Target.

On the client side, our work for Jockey is also having a strong impact on their business. The "Show 'em your Jockey" campaign is about showing the world the real you, underneath. We didn't use actors; we found real people, like Lisa, a female firefighter, and Chris, a double amputee veteran, and simply got them to open up by asking them questions and shooting the footage differently. There is so much social-media pressure today, which interferes with making true connections, and we wanted to tap into that. It's really about how a brand connects to a consumer to elevate their lives.

Are you competing with the traditional advertising companies?

Yes, although we do things completely differently from the competition. There is no ad agency that has built a brand from scratch and managed to get it into Walmart. We understand the importance of merchandising because we have brands on the shelf. We understand the supply chain. We understand about ROI around communication and media. If we didn't have that proof of concept as business owners that we can build things from scratch, we could not stand here with credibility. We haven't done

any publicity. We wanted to build up case studies that show that what we're doing is working instead of going out there and promoting that we have a different model.

Are you working at the CMO level or higher up?

We often deal with a CMO and CEO who are joined at the hip. What appeals to CEOs working with us is that we're all about growth. We don't want our clients to just say they want an ad; they might not need it. They might need to do something else. Every brand has a different situation, and it needs unique thinking. Most companies still have the traditional growth levers that worked for them 10 years ago, and we come in and challenge those growth levers. With the way technology evolves, those growth levers are already outdated.

Are there specific industries you're most focused on?

Our methodology works across most businesses, but we look for a client that is tired of the old way of doing things and wants to find a different way.

Do you anticipate a turnover for Pure Growth?

I hold onto businesses longer than people realize. This is three years old, and I have already had people show an interest in buying it so they can build off the platform, but we're happy with what we're doing. Our focus is on differentiated work that is driving the businesses we own and our clients' businesses. We want to make sure the decisions we're making today are going to put us and them in a better position in 12 months' time. Being publicly listed would require significant change in headcount and be incredibly disruptive.

In building your team, what do you look for?

We can't work with glass-half-empty people. It's an honor to come to work each day and that mentality is infectious. We have an open working plan and we need positive people who are intellectually curious.

Did you have the goal early on of creating businesses?

Most people are creators or business people, but I think creativity is critical to driving growth in business. There is a critical role for a third party to go to bigger companies and challenge their laws of growth, and it's a good thing for us that I don't know anyone who has our model. ●