

INDIE|TOP 40

AGENCY NEWS

WEIRDOS, MISFITS + UNDERDOGS

Below, you'll find all of the fields needed for your entry/entries.

For Agency Entries:

Agency

This is the name of your independent agency.

CROWN

Year Founded

2011

Location(s)

Enter your agency's HQ/main location(s) (city, state/province, country).

Seattle, WA (HQ), Los Angeles, CA

Agency Type/Specialty

Describe your agency's primary focus or specialty.

Full-service, social-first digital marketing, branding, and design agency specializing in culturally fluent campaigns, creative community building, and bold storytelling across social, digital, and experiential platforms.

Size

Enter the current number of employees at your agency.

~15 employees (core team + network of collaborators)

Which best describes your agency? ☐ Weirdo ☐ Misfit ☐ Underdog ☒ Other:
Outsiders



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The Rule Breakers

What industry norms does your agency deliberately break? What makes you proudly "not like the others"?

CROWN started with a backpack full of posters, a staple gun, and a tupperware full of home-brewed wheatpaste on Capitol Hill. Of course we also had stickers and flyers, and we'd sell you a mixtape if you stopped to talk to us. We were kids from the Seattle music scene who understood that effective promotion feels like culture, not advertising. Our first "campaigns" were wheatpasted to telephone poles. We didn't know the rules, and when we found out, we ignored them. Incidentally, we were sued by the City of San Francisco for vandalism because of one of our guerilla marketing projects, and SXSW tore down our dating app client's posters one year because they were "too risque."

Example: PureOne Golf. When tasked with a full re-launch campaign (everything but the logo stamped into the side of their clubs), we didn't begin with brand guidelines or a TV storyboard. We began with a golf YouTuber's raw, unpolished content style. We built the website, campaign creative, and social presence around that aesthetic, then worked backwards into other channels. The goal was to make golf feel less country club, more driving range with friends. The result? A younger, hungrier golf audience showed up. (fig. 1)

The Culture Code

What unique process, philosophy, or vibe could only exist because you're independent?

CROWN doesn't run like an agency; we run like a creative collective with a liquor license. Our Monday "all hands" happens over americanos at Analog Coffee or bloody marys at Lost Lake Café, not in a beige conference room. Our brainstormers are as likely to reference a Boiler Room set, a Stranger comic, or a TikTok sound as they are an HBR report.

Our office is organized chaos (fig. 2): turntables next to whiteboards, zines stacked on PowerPoints, neon pulled from past nightclub projects lighting the room. DJs, meme-makers, strategists, coders -- we all pitch side by side. Independence lets us keep it messy, fun, and honest.

The Proof

Show us what independence has allowed you to accomplish that wouldn't be possible elsewhere.

-> 1 Hotels: When we were hired to launch the Seattle property earlier this year, we pushed for a less polished, more "lived in" and community-focused, social-first strategy -- the opposite of luxury's typically glossy, aspirational template. It fucking crushed -- fueling the two fastest-growing property launches in company history #nbd -- and is on its way to becoming the new social strategy for the whole brand. We "learned" these techniques working with small businesses that we would never have been able to consider at WPP or Dentsu, but who are so much closer to culture, setting trends vs. following. (fig. 3)

-> Amazon: We started working with Amazon more than 10 years ago with an influencer campaign starring Yoko Ono, The Flaming Lips, Brandi Carlile, and Liz Phair, and now we're currently designing the new AWS.com. Between then and now we've built messaging toolkits used in every single global warehouse, produced 200+ page, perfect-bound academic journals on AI, supported more than two dozen keynote speakers at re:Invent and re:MARS, hosted Black Violin and Kim Petras in our office, and designed promo and stadium graphics for sponsored concerts featuring Katy Perry, Lil Nas X, Head & The Heart & more. The key to all this experience and traction inside one giant company: being open to different types of projects -- big AND small. Oh, and operating a cocktail bar smack dab in the middle of Amazonland with an adjoining office and creative studio probably didn't hurt.

We don't just market culture; we live it. From bars (fig. 4), bevies (fig. 5), nightclubs (fig. 6), and art galleries (fig. 7), to apparel brands and SaaS tools, we build our own worlds and invite our clients inside. We work with small businesses we'd never be able to consider at the coldcos, start businesses that shareholders would never approve, and do pro-bono for whoever the fuck we want to. (fig. 8)

The Origin Story (Optional)

What sparked your agency's creation? Was there a defining moment that set you on the indie path?

We were born out of Seattle's underground. Promoters, DJs, and DIY creatives who made fan art for our favorite musicians and collaborated with the whole damn scene on our album art (fig. 9). We built an artist collective, record label, and event series through guerilla marketing, and when we eventually got jobs at the holdcos and realized we'd been doing the same damn thing ourselves all along, we jumped ship (with no clients, initially) and never looked back.

The Fight Club (Optional)

What's been your biggest challenge as an independent, and how did you overcome it?

Our biggest challenge has always been scale -- not in the sense of "bodies" or "headcount," but in how to deliver fresh creative without burning out a small team. The solution wasn't to bloat with layers of staff. It was to flip the process.

Here's how it works: a creative director, a strategist, and an account manager sit down to map what we're trying to achieve. Like every agency, we build moodboards, we scroll Instagram, we pull references. But here's where we break the norm: instead of recreating that inspiration with our internal team, we go straight to the source. We hire the creators who sparked the idea in the first place.

If a TikTok animator, a meme-maker, or a muralist inspires our moodboard -- we bring them in (W2 before 1099). That way, the work carries the DNA of the culture it came from, and we tap into their built-in fan base in the process. It's how we've scaled without selling out: by hiring outsiders who haven't drank the Kool-Aid and keeping the work as authentic as the inspiration.

Case in point: Mike Force, illustrator for The Stranger. We took a risk hiring him for a Dell Technologies campaign that we knew needed to break all the rules (fig. 10). Mike became a W2 at CROWN, doing amazing work for Pike Place Market, Intuitive Surgical, and Amazon (fig. 11).

The Future Vision (Optional)

How do you see independence evolving in our industry, and what role will your agency play in that future?

The next wave of agencies won't be bloated networks -- they'll be indie collectives. Smaller, faster, & weird. Here's why:

- > Transparency: Social has unmasked the creative workforce. Clients see who does the work and want direct access.
- > AI: It's eating the boring stuff (billing, scheduling, admin), letting indies scale without as much overhead.
- > Creators: Millions of wanna-be "influencers" are now realizing not everyone can be a celebrity, and what's almost as cool? Starting a services business!
- > Wellness + Autonomy: The next generation of creatives don't want to grind 80-hour weeks in holding companies. They want freedom, flexibility, and ownership.

CROWN is already living this future: experimenting with hybrid creator-employee models, incubating side brands, and starting campaigns where culture actually happens instead of bolting it on after the fact. We're not the agency of record. We're the agency of rebellion. Here's to the outsiders.

fig. 1



fig. 2



fig. 3

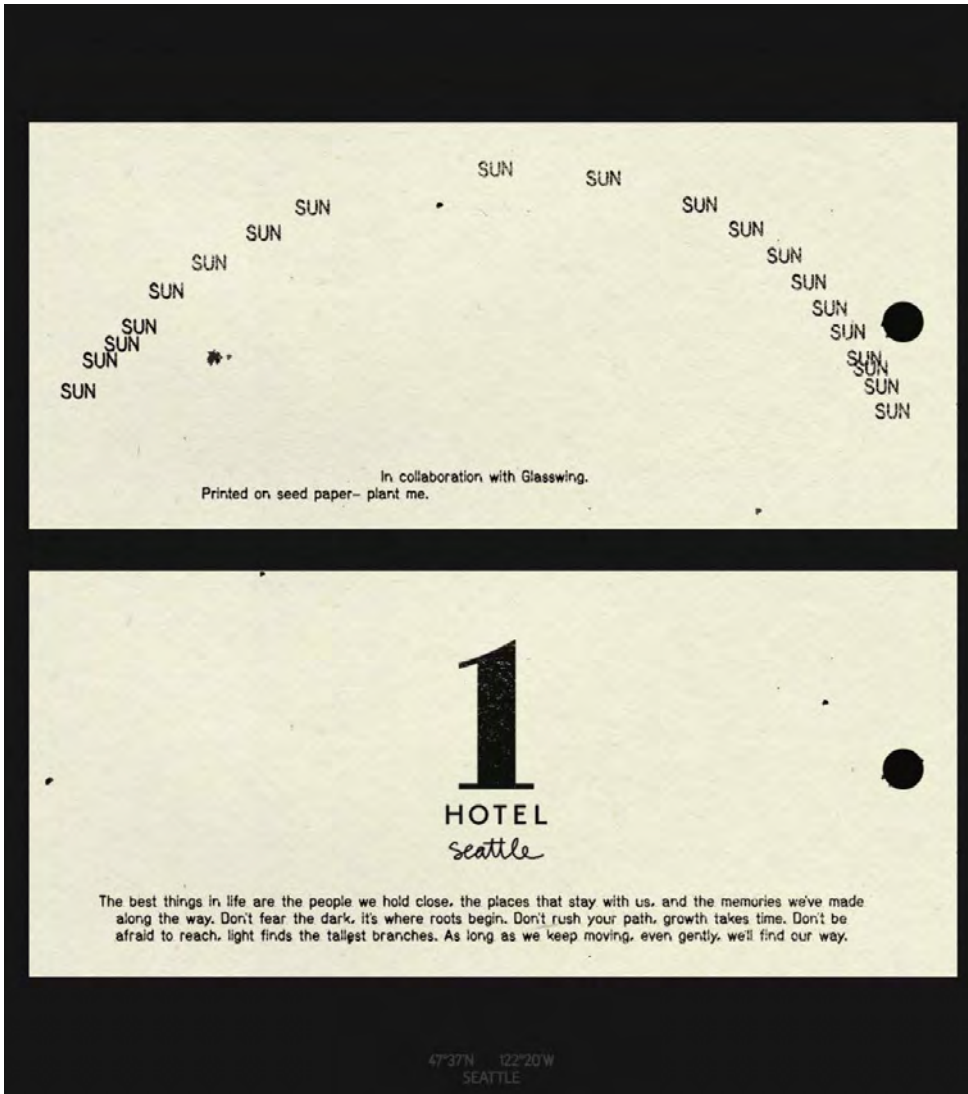


fig. 4



fig. 5

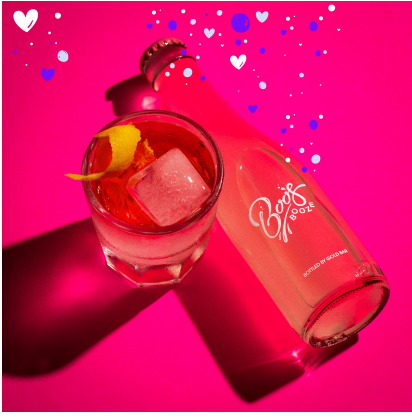


fig. 6



fig. 7



fig. 8

SESSIONS IN PLACE PRESENTS

A NEW HYBRID LIVESTREAM EXPERIENCE

EMERALD CITY TRAPEZE

MAY 18

7PM PST

IMMERSIVE MUSIC SHOWCASE BY

SASSY BLACK → HOLOGRAM FUNK

ART AND CONVERSATIONS

ARCHANA PRASAD → FOUNDER & GLOBAL FUTURIST

DARA → AI-POWERED CONVERSATION BOT

KATE BAILEY → IS IT LISTENING SURVEILLANCE BALLOONS

MAI CLARO → EEG CONTROLLED VISUALS

BAILEY AMBROSE → LIDAR THE DRUMMING ROBOT

!

FUTURE ARTS LIVE!

fig. 9

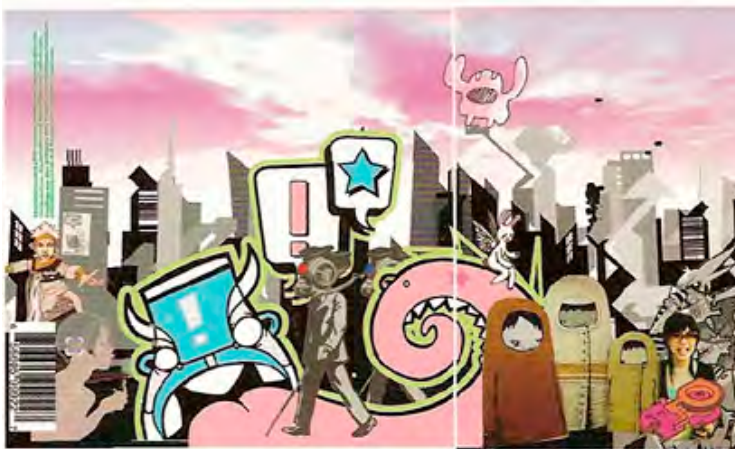


fig. 10

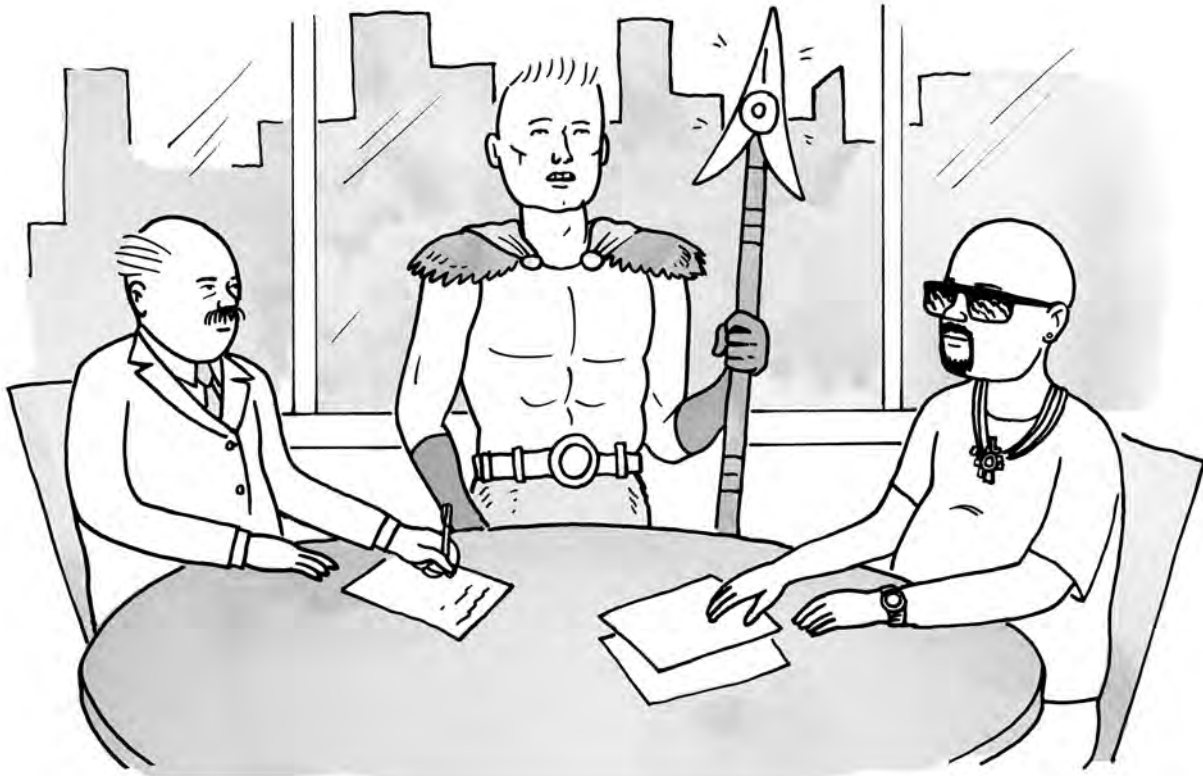


fig. 11



