IPG Media Lab sounds like an exciting place to work. What are you involved in there?

Melvin Wilson: At the lab I lead strategy and research. On the strategy side, my group manages our thought leadership on trends and on topics from messaging apps to connected TV and digital video and we speak at industry events like IAB MIXX at Advertising Week. On the research side, we conduct media trials, study consumer behavior and develop white papers.

A research study that we developed in partnership with YuMe set out to define and measure consumer receptivity and attention as it relates to digital video advertising. We analyzed how a consumer’s device, mood and location affect receptivity and attention. For example, is it possible to truly ascertain the optimal moment to find a consumer who is both receptive and attentive? More importantly, when we find that consumer, are they more likely to have higher brand or message recall? Results revealed the increasing role of mobile and its ability to catch a consumer on the go, in an active mindset. Overall, we found that context is key to predicting a consumer’s level of receptivity—that is, their openness to advertising messages and attention, or the degree of engagement with advertising content.

The Lab also has a creative and scouting side of the business, where we identify new technologies and find out how they work at the intersection of brands, media and technology. Then we work with our internal creative team to build prototypes of how those new concepts might work, and how they apply to brands and media companies. Last but not least, the Lab leads walkthroughs of the physical Lab and trendsetting events like CES with IPG clients and partner brands.

Does the Media Lab conduct technology trials and tests?

Wilson: We do technology trials and market testing. A lot of times we will take products that are already in the market and try to figure out ways to use them that are more refined for brands. For example, a tech company will come to us with a product that has hundreds of millions of users. The first thing we ask is, do media people know how to buy
it? And a lot of times the answer is no. So we try to test how the product works within a media construct, and if it works, how it can be bought. Often, that’s how some of these platforms get onto media plans.

**How big is your organization?**

Wilson: The lab is about 25 people; the majority are in New York, which is where we have our physical exhibit space full of screens, drones and connected TVs. Our research team is in San Francisco, where we’ll bring people in to conduct lab studies where we get to use tools like biometric bracelets. We also have people viewing media in a living-room environment so we can track their engagement between devices. We’ve actually built our own custom tool where we can track attention, behavior and emotion via facial coding. It works on any device that has a camera and is connected to the web, and you can use it in tandem with surveys.

**What are your top business priorities and challenges?**

Wilson: The top business priorities for us in the next year are developing more ways to tie media touches to physical attribution—in other words, tracking actions people take on phones, TVs and tablets and being able to match them to actions people do offline.

Another priority is looking at how to tie big data to small tasks. Big data is very useful, but only if you can tie it back to actions you’re trying to get people to do, or information you’re trying to learn about an audience.

Finally, we want to find ways to use social data to inform our efforts in programmatic, mobile and proximity targeting with solutions like beacons.

**How do you and your team use eMarketer?**

Wilson: In many cases we will use eMarketer to either point out the direction of trends, or to point out why product adoption is important now rather than waiting for a couple of years. Take messaging apps, and the ability to show that hundreds of millions of people in multiple regions not only use them for chat, but also e-commerce. We compare and contrast our forecasts with eMarketer’s, especially for global and regional trends.

**Why is it important that everyone at the Media Lab has access to eMarketer as a business intelligence tool?**

Wilson: It helps in that we can quickly look at things like market sizing, adoption rates and other trends in terms of where people aggregate or where they’re moving from a media perspective. It also helps us look at what that means for some of our clients’ businesses. We can then compare the media affect to business outcomes, which we can either pitch to clients or prove out to clients for services that are being rendered by our sibling agencies Universal McCann, Initiative or BPN. Of course, it also helps us understand the macrotrends so that we can be more of a partner in our clients’ business results.

**Do you have any specific examples of where you’ve used eMarketer to help make a case for something or inform a perspective?**

Wilson: We’ve used it in workshops where we leverage trends against clients’ needs to gain market share, get consideration or optimize the products and services they already have. eMarketer helps get our people up to speed on other regions to compare them with what we see here in the US, so we can take specific elements of a region and capitalize on trends we see.

**What is the value of having everybody in your organization have access to eMarketer?**

Wilson: A key part of the job is thought leadership, and eMarketer can help showcase our story. It’s important to have insights available for people who work at the 30,000-foot level as well as the research side, where people are working on granular data. eMarketer provides the “in-between” information that helps us become an everyday tool for many of our clients.

**What keeps you excited about what you’re doing?**

Wilson: Tying together what people do and technology in new ways that make overall experiences better.