

ONE SIX EIGHT FOR WTHR-TV GRAPHICS REDESIGN

SAN FRANCISCO: OneSixEight Design Group has completed a total overhaul of the on-air news identity for NBC affiliate WTHR-TV, the leading station in the Indianapolis market. Work on the package began in January, with a phone call from station design director Janet Birkhead. Impressed with the graphic looks OneSixEight developed for NBC's Today and Dateline shows, Birkhead contacted company president Jan Phillips in search of a bold, clean, contemporary look that would put WTHR "light years beyond the competition."

"WTHR had already achieved a significant market leadership position," explains OneSixEight creative director Brad Soderlund. "Designing a totally new look for a #1 station was an interesting challenge. The 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' factor was a valid consideration, but the station's marketing team was confident enough in their position to WELCOME new ideas. In fact, after our initial presentation they expanded the project with the addition of animations for its UPN sister station and Cable Weather Channel."

Although the station's existing on-air approach provided a clear indication of the production values and sophistication Birkhead sought, a substantial equipment upgrade was in progress at the time. This required OneSixEight to carefully assess how the daily application of their graphic toolkits would interact with those on-going technical decisions.

To supplement their creative staff to meet the demands of the massive assignment, Phillips re-teamed with Marco Bacich and Nick DiNapoli of SF-based Drive Studio. Because they had made important contributions to previous OneSixEight NBC News projects, the Drive Team knew the territory and had a proven collaborative track record with the innovative motion graphics identity company.

As the design team developed a range of ideas and color possibilities they produced a series of basic motion sketches to bring WTHR keywords like Skytrak, Top Story and Nite Beat to life. "These early tests proved to be crucial experiments," Soderlund said. "Scale and scope became key elements in this phase. We learned that Indiana is known as "Cloud Country," its spacious, uninterrupted horizons suggest a "Big Sky" image, an aspect of the region that spoke to the station's unchallenged market domination. We also studied WTHR's coverage map which clearly illustrated the vast scope of their reach. Simplified and stylized, that map became a principal motif for the package," he adds.

"OneSixEight sculpted a metaphor FOR the station's ability to stay tuned-in with the community," Janet Birkhead points out. "The choice of the coverage map was ideal for the designs. It provided an extremely effective balance between the abstract and the literal."

Following a successful final design presentation in Indianapolis the design team spent the next eight weeks developing an extensive tool kit of elements and layouts for the station. The coverage map motif was applied to a host of designs through hundreds of storyboard frames. The team maintained close contact with Birkhead, who kept OneSixEight fully apprised of the station's workflow and technical upgrades.

Production began in July, with the final delivery timed for the October 6th debut. The completed package featured almost 600 elements including nearly 200 unique animations. OneSixEight also extended its capabilities by providing a host of expandable elements. In addition to final tapes, WTHR received twenty DVDs of still Chyron elements and project breakouts – nearly 50GB of editable, alterable, customizable material which will enable WTHR to further version or expand the package for some time.

Cut to a powerful original score by Randy Wachler of 615 Music in Nashville, the sweeping imagery establish a commanding 'can-do' sense of professionalism and commitment for WTHR. "We consider this package, our first 'official' station redesign," Soderlund says. "Our extensive discussions with Janet Birkhead, WTHR Promotions Manager Jeff Dutton and the entire station team, were extremely helpful in insuring that the material would be properly implemented and not lose focus."

Jan Phillips characterizes the experience as a totally collaborative effort between WTHR and OneSixEight. "My own background as a station design director provided me with a genuine understanding of what Janet was looking to accomplish", she adds. "We spoke the same language and shared an appreciation for the real world needs of a TV station that broadcasts as much news as WTHR does on a daily basis."