

CAMA'S AGRI-MARKETER OF THE YEAR

by Beth Roeser, *Think Shift*

David Lazarenko is thankful for his failures, and not just because he's learned from them. "If you've never pushed for an idea that didn't work," he's been known to ask, "How do you know you're pushing hard enough?"

Over his 20-plus-year career in the agri-marketing industry, Lazarenko has become known for pushing. During that time he's led successful brand and product launches, re-branding and brand alignment initiatives, sales campaigns and corporate responsibility campaigns for some of agriculture's most successful corporations. He has been involved in strategic marketing and communications initiatives for grower groups, industry associations, line companies, independent agri-retail, seed, chem and crop protection companies as well as equipment and ag companies. Now, he is Partner and Chief Growth Officer at **Think Shift**, the fastest growing agricultural marketing agency in North America.

Lazarenko has been instrumental in growing Think Shift from a Winnipeg-based agency serving clients in western Canada to a global agency serving clients on three different continents. Today, Think Shift is a full-service digital agency that helps clients drive change from the inside out, from leadership and culture consulting services to digital marketing strategy and execution, brand strategy and more. Under Lazarenko's leadership, Think Shift has grown by 75% in the past two years, expanding its focus and clientele to include new partnerships with **ADAMA Global**, **Verdesian Life Sciences**, **Elanco Animal Health**, **Concentric Ag** and **Trimble Agriculture**, among others.

This year also marked Think Shift's long-awaited move into its new Winnipeg headquarters, a heritage redevelopment project in the East Exchange District of the city. Think Shift now occupies an impressive new office in the rafters of the **James Avenue Pump House**,



David Lazarenko

where employees stroll along glass walls overlooking the building's original early 20th century machinery. The overall effect echoes the dynamic driving Think Shift's growth: hard work, heritage and a focus on big things ahead.

It's an apt fit for Lazarenko, who believes the ag industry is on the precipice of change and sees great potential for ag to increase its presence in the digital space. "To a certain point," he says, "agri-marketing has traditionally treated farmers as less progressive than they are. We are starting to see the pendulum swing the other way, and at Think Shift are constantly challenging ourselves and our clients to go beyond traditional notions." Under his leadership Think Shift guides clients to strive to be the best marketers, period. By constantly monitoring the latest trends in marketing, Lazarenko and Think Shift have helped clients close the digital gap, capturing the attention of both their farmer customers and the agri-marketing world at large.

As Amazon and other e-commerce entities promise to bring enormous changes to the agricultural industry, Lazarenko believes the industry must adapt and that all agri-marketers have a responsibility to help make that happen. That means discarding the notion that farmers are resistant to change and stepping up to help them be on the cutting edge of future innovations. "We must continue to challenge the implicit assumptions we hold about ourselves and our industry," said Lazarenko. "To stay competitive against the giants, we must constantly adapt and deliver a product better than our competition."

That's a goal Lazarenko continues to drive forward at Think Shift, which has devoted the upcoming year to the theme of changing perspectives. As the company continues to grow, he's more determined than ever to enact change and create value for clients and for the industry. "I have the best job in the world – and as long as I can contribute, I am going to continue to push our company and clients to deliver world-class marketing to farmers and the ag industry."

Lazarenko continues to be inspired by the agri-marketers who have come before him and paved the way for the work he is able to do today. He hopes to serve as an example for – and to one day be bested by – the next generation of marketers. In the meantime, count on him to continue bring a fresh perspective to the table. **AM**