

Global CEO Chris Hirst's surprise exit from Havas Creative

Numerous media sources in the advertising industry have reported that global CEO Chris Hirst has made a surprise exit from Havas Creative, with Havas Health & You CEO, Donna Murphy taking over his role.



Source: © Campaign UK [Campaign UK](#) Chris Hirst (right) has made a surprise exit, with Donna Murphy (left) taking over the leadership of Havas Creative

Hirst's abrupt departure is said to have happened quickly and caught insiders by surprise. It is thought that he does not have a new role.

[Campaign UK](#) says the British-born Hirst, one of the most senior figures in UK advertising, is departing to "pursue new opportunities".

"Hirst departs after nearly seven years, having led Havas' creative group for the past three-and-a-half years, prior to which he was CEO and chairman of Havas UK. He joined Havas in 2015 from WPP agency Grey London, which he led for nearly 12 years," says the article.

Part of simplification strategy

The move comes as the Havas Group consolidates leadership of its health division and creative group under Murphy as global creative CEO in a move it says is part of its simplification strategy.

As part of a transformation plan to simplify its structure through the "Together" strategy, the group will bring the creative and health divisions - Havas Creative and Havas Health & You - closer together under Murphy reports [Adweek](#).

Campaign UK further reports that it is understood that the consolidation at Havas is also in line with a wider drive at parent company Vivendi in recent months — with some Havas executives adding responsibilities with Vivendi, the owner of Canal+ and Studiocanal.

Health: a major growth driver

The publication quotes a source close to Havas saying that it made sense to bring the creative and health businesses closer

together because of growing demand from global clients for integrated, pitches at the agency holding company level and pointed to the rapid growth of Havas' health division under Murphy.

"Health has been a major growth driver for agency groups during the pandemic and since then. Havas' health division accounted for 24% of the group's revenue in 2021, according to its annual report, while creative accounted for 44% and media made up the rest at 32," says the source.

Long-time leader of health

Murphy is the long-time leader of Havas' health business. She became CEO of Havas Health & You in 2017, an entity formed by merging Havas' consumer health practices. Murphy has been with the group for more than 35 years, over which time she has led several acquisitions.

"She has little experience on the creative side of the agency business. She started her career as an accountant at Ernst & Whinney and then as a financial analyst at Goldman Sachs, " says Campaign UK.

Murphy also serves on the Havas Group executive committee and will continue her close collaboration with the global media network, which is led by Peter Mears.

Further leadership changes

According to AdWeek further leadership changes will see Mears also become chairman of the Havas NA Village in addition to his role as CEO of Havas' Global Media Group, bringing a more unified approach to the Group's largest region.

Steve Netzley, founder and CEO of the Havas Edge Performance Network, will join the Havas Group Executive Committee.

In preparation for the move, Elizabeth Egan was named as CEO of HH&Y Europe in June, reporting to Murphy. As well as the European health operation, Egan will also oversee the expansion of the division into APAC overseen by Charles Houdoux, CEO of APAC and LATAM at HH&Y says Adweek.