

MEDIA EXPERTS

They've been going strong for years, but in 2010 Media Experts became a player to watch—for this year and beyond BY CHRIS POWELL

It has spent much of this decade in growth mode, adding several blue-chip accounts while keeping existing clients in the fold, delivering innovative media programs and exploring new ways to help marketers connect with consumers. Yet 2010 could be considered the year that Media Experts truly arrived.

On its own, being named media AOR for a massive brand like Bell—particularly without having to endure a formal review—makes for a great year. And then agency founder Mark Sherman caps it off by hiring Lauren Richards, one of the top media agency leaders in the country, to take over as his CEO. “Lauren is a stellar talent,” says Sherman. “She brings with her an incredible depth of experience, a like-minded focus on customer service and an unparalleled track record for innovation. I’m thrilled she joined us and really believe the next decade will bring great things for Media Experts and our customers.”

Asked to summarize a whirlwind 12 months, Media Experts president Penny Stevens pauses for several seconds before letting out an audible but satisfied sigh.

“I suspect this is going to be one of those watershed years, and that we’ll begin to think of our business as before Telus [the longtime telecommunications client the agency parted with after landing the Bell business] and after Telus and the beginning of Bell,” she says.

Though Bell only officially started working with Media Experts at the start of November, the Bell marketing brain trust of Wade Oosterman and Rick Seifeddine worked with the agency for years at Telus.

Seifeddine praises the agency’s depth of experience and expertise, their strong relationships in the industry and says they are “fearsome negotiators on behalf of one’s media budget.” Beyond that, he says, Bell hired Media Experts for a little peace of mind. “They are one of the best service companies we have ever worked with,” says Seifeddine. “They have perfected the art of meeting a corporation’s rapidly changing marcom needs. I rank a call to Media Experts, especially when you have a time-limited crisis, to be almost as relieving as a call to 911.”

Aside from landing a new star client and new star CEO, Media Experts also produced boundary-breaking work for longtime clients Bombardier and WestJet, the completion of a successful first year servicing the BMW/Mini assignment, and continued development of proprietary research metrics, checking the boxes on standard business success metrics, including an 8.4% increase in year-over-year revenues between fiscal 2009 and fiscal 2010. Not only the country’s largest independent media services firm, Media Experts’ billings are now comparable to several of its network rivals.

In terms of standout work, for WestJet, Media Experts used the closed-

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captioning pod position in new way via 10-second standalone brand spots with more than 200 market specific messages that could be updated and turned over in as little as 48 hours.

But perhaps no single piece of work embodies the agency's willingness to work beyond traditional media planning and buying parameters than its Olympic-focused work with Bombardier.

Armed with the insight that the Olympic Torch is one of the most powerful and unifying symbols of the Games, Media Experts came up with the idea for Bombardier to both design and manufacture the torch—which would be carried through more than 1,000 Canadian communities en route to the Games. Sherman—who served as one of the torch-bearers—calls the program “the accomplishment I am most proud of” for the year. “The torch was the culmination of a five-year strategy designed in conjunction with Taxi to bring Bombardier closer to the hearts and minds of Canadians. It is rare for marcom practitioners to have the opportunity to take a long-term view, and even rarer that we get the opportunity to build and roll out a plan to such an epic outcome.”

The initiative gained traction through word of mouth, with people who mentioned the Torch on Twitter and Facebook personally invited to Bombardier's YouTube channel. The initiative was further enhanced by local and national media coverage.

After the Games, the annual CROP survey on the impact reported a significant upswing in public opinion for Bombardier, with the number of Canadians with a favourable opinion of the company growing by 28% to 32%. The number of Canadians aware that the company had designed and manufactured the



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Torch was estimated at 15 million.

So is this emblematic of the work Media Experts is trying to do? “Yes and no,” says Stevens. “Really what we’re looking for is something that’s going to work for the customer, and if it doesn’t exist, great, we’ll go and find it. And if it does exist, let’s repurpose it and make it work.”

Such liberated thinking indicates that as a business entity, Media Experts is arguably in the best shape it’s ever been. In many ways, it’s the arrival of the fittest.