

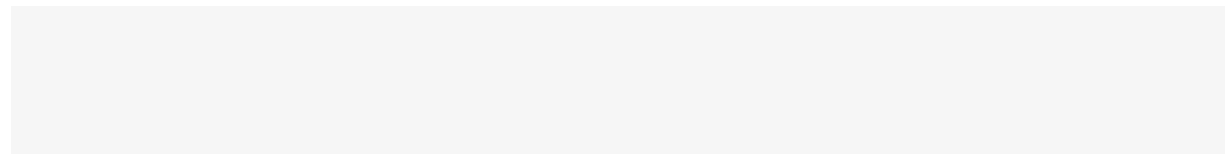
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MARKETING

Media Experts climbed to the top by being 'mavericks'

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Mark Sherman, founder and owner of Media Experts, won Media Director of the Year at the 2011 Strategy Awards John Mahoney / Postmedia News

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Hollie Shaw Nov 11, 2011 – 8:54 AM ET

Mark Sherman is founder, owner and executive chairman of Media Experts, which celebrates its 30th anniversary in the business this month. Canada's largest independent media services firm, Media Experts has offices in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver with annual media billings of close to \$300-million. Its customers include Bell, Best Buy/Future Shop, BMW, HBO Canada and WestJet. The company has won numerous accolades over the years, including a silver in Media Agency of the Year at Thursday's Strategy Awards. Mr. Sherman also tied with Terry Horton of Cossette Media as Media Director of the Year. The Financial Post's Hollie Shaw spoke with Mr. Sherman about getting his start in the business and his take on the rapidly diversifying media space.

Q *How did you get your start in the business?*

A I got started in the business doing ski reports on the radio station CHOM-FM in Montreal. After that, I became promotions manager of the radio station and I was also the radio station mascot, Rocky Raccoon.

From there, I went into the sales department and at age 24, I was promoted to sales manager. After that, I left to go into the media buying business.

There were limited options in radio in Montreal, and [staying with radio] would have meant travelling to London [Ont.] or Saskatchewan, and it would mean leaving my home in Montreal.

When I was [with CHOM and] visiting ad agencies, I was involved with people who were very focused on creative. They didn't have the necessary skills to evaluate media opportunities and didn't understand return on investment or audience research.

At that time, there was a great deal of focus in the agency world solely on the message – on creativity – and not on the media that still represents 90% of an advertisers' spend.

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Retail and Marketing Reporter

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I saw an opportunity to go into a specialized form of the ad business that concentrated on ROI rather than a sole concentration on creativity.

We started with three people in November 1981. Back then, the ad agency world was made up of full-service agencies that had offerings that included strategy, creative and media, and companies such as ours that specialized in media [buying] were thought to be rebels. In the early 90s, all of the full-service agencies spun out their media departments into freestanding media service entities. That legitimized companies such as ours that were thought to be mavericks, and made us more mainstream.

Q *Is there a benefit to being an independent media services company as opposed to a part of a larger network?*

A I think that there is tremendous benefit to our shareholders, employees and customers. We are really the only independent media services company of size in Canada. Our competition are globally owned companies, some of which have 50,000 employees, others of which have 15,000 or 20,000 employees and are part of a very big machine. It makes them less nimble, more difficult for them to react to changing market conditions, either macro or micro conditions in terms of adapting to new technologies, making quick decisions in order to better service the customer, making quick human resources decisions, hiring decisions, and so on. As a private company, we are also not driven by quarter-to-quarter performance.

Q *What is your most recent and favourite use of creative media and why?*

A We negotiated on behalf of Bombardier for them to become an Olympic sponsor, and more importantly, to design and build an Olympic torch [for the Vancouver 2010 games]. Our objective was to help bring Bombardier closer to Canadians, highlight that they were a Canadian company that was competing on the world stage, and we chose the Olympics as an emotional platform and the flame as a symbol of youth and sports to help Bombardier get closer to the Canadian public. In research of opinion on Canadian corporations, Bombardier's rankings moved from the middle of the pack to the top of the pack [after the torch completed its crosscountry relay]. There was a measurable increase in how Canadians felt about the brand.

Q *What is the most interesting trend that you see on the horizon in your business?*

A Mobile search is a very important trend. Consumers are using their phones to find places that are close by and have become accustomed to updating this computer in their pocket every 18 months or so. The fact that the consumer is willing to work through their relationship with their telecom provider and upgrade this device on a constant basis makes it a very important and powerful trend. It is not hard to imagine being able to command your smartphone not by a keyboard, not by speaking to it, but just by thinking. It's not hard to imagine that one day you will be able to make a device search the Internet and [display the results] inside of your glasses. And there are futurists who believe that those devices will be embedded in our body by 2040, and that the display will be shown at the back of our eye rather than the back of our glasses.

Q *Is the business becoming more challenging from your point of view?*

A I think our business offers greater opportunity than it used to. As media fragments and proliferates, as all of these challenges manifest, the value of our service is enhanced. The more questions advertisers have about the right way to enjoy a consumer with their message, the more they need a service like ours that is focused on solving and simplifying those issues and knowing what works for a particular advertiser. All of this turmoil creates opportunity and demand for our services. I think I am in the most exciting business in the world at the most exciting time to be in it.

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