

Coming Together

An Interview with Michael I. Roth,
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Interpublic Group

EDITORS' NOTE Under Michael Roth's leadership, IPG has delivered industry-leading shareholder returns and organic growth, posted long-term operating margin improvement, significantly upgraded the company's portfolio of agency offerings and presence in high-growth markets, and established a record of industry-leading corporate governance, environmental and social good.



Michael I. Roth

COMPANY BRIEF Headquartered in New York, IPG (interpublic.com) is one of the world's largest advertising and marketing companies. From global communications networks like McCann and FCB to domestic advertising agencies like Hill Holliday, The Martin Agency and Deutsch, to global specialists like the data and technology company Acxiom, the events marketer Jack Morton, sports marketer Octagon, and public relations experts Weber Shandwick, IPG agencies span the globe, employing 54,000 people in more than 100 countries, working with clients like L'Oréal, Unilever, General Motors and Geico.

The world is facing an unprecedented crisis that is impacting all countries and their citizens. The pandemic is being fought on the front lines by healthcare workers, first responders, those providing supplies and meals, transportation workers and all other

essential workers. What do you say to these true leaders and heroes that are risking their lives to protect others?

This time is unlike anything any of us have ever lived through and what we really have to be thankful for is the amazing bravery of those who are putting themselves on the front lines every day. The respect and gratitude we have for these folks is immeasurable. Since we are a company that does marketing and advertising for a living, we've created some really nice work around that sentiment that shows appreciation for everyone from delivery folks to health-care staffers. You can view it on our website at www.interpublic.com/our-work.

We must, of course, be mindful of the parallel pandemic we are facing in terms of systemic racism in this country. We are working with employees to address this and have taken several initial steps to do so.

IPG is a company that has a long culture and commitment around community engagement and addressing societal need. What do you see as the role that IPG can play in waging this battle?

The work our agencies have done around COVID-19 includes tackling difficult issues that have emerged as a result of this virus and the lockdowns such as an increase in domestic violence. Some are calling it the "Shadow Pandemic," which has seen numbers

rising and calls to domestic violence helplines skyrocketing. To bring attention to this issue, we partnered with UN Women to create a very moving campaign created by MRM and CRAFT.

This is in line with work we've been doing for a long time around gender issues and women's rights. We Vice Chair the UNWomen's Unstereotype Alliance which works to remove harmful stereotypes from marketing messages. There's a lot of power in what we do and it's our job to ensure that our values play a part in the way we go about our business. This applies, of course, to the issue of structural racism that we are seeing emerge so starkly in the wake of COVID-19, which we know has had a disproportionate impact on Black and Brown communities. We are supporting organizations like the New York Urban League as they grapple with this.

Following the killing of George Floyd, our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) team has hosted a number of "Neighborhood Gatherings" for our Black and Brown employees to ensure a safe forum for them. We have also hosted calls for allies of our Black and Brown Employees.

We have committed to doing more to make ourselves accountable when it comes to DEI. This includes sharing the breakdown of minorities in our executive ranks, which neither we, nor anyone in our industry, has done before. We have also committed to expanding our DEI-related compensation goals and our work on pay equity.

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IPG was built with an entrepreneurial spirit and an ability to be nimble and adapt. How is IPG addressing its business during this challenging time in order to succeed in this difficult environment?

Our people haven't missed a beat. We always had some folks working from home, but as of a few weeks ago, we had 95 percent of our people working from home. During this time, we are winning business, producing great work, conducting remote pitches, and connecting with our people and our clients.

How have IPG's employees changed the way they work in order to be effective with the changes that have been necessary for all businesses to make?

Our employees have stayed connected and have turned up their games. They are thinking creatively and working to move our businesses and those of our clients forward. Often they are doing this while working with their kids on remote learning, taking care of relatives, cooking dinner and managing a houseful of people. It's remarkable. We've found that what we have to remind people is to take some time off, unplug and take a break.

We are also working hard to ensure that we retain our focus on diversity, equity and inclusion during this time. With an overwhelming majority of our employees working from home, we have to look at how to do this. Our D&I group has created some excellent tools to help managers retain this focus. We now have a microsite called "Inclusive at Work," that focuses on just these types of issues.

There is a great deal of discussion about businesses reopening in a "new normal." What is your outlook for what this new normal may look like and how is IPG preparing for the next stage in this crisis?

First, I think it's important to distinguish between a return to work and a return to the office. Our employees haven't stopped working – that's for sure. Returning to the office is a different story. As we've told our people, it's not an easy question when you start to think about how and when. A few of our offices in certain locations around the globe have started to re-open and, for sure, it's a new normal, as it will be when we re-open offices on a larger scale. We will, of course, have to respect and abide by all local regulations – and then some.

As was the case when we closed our offices, our priority will be the safety and well-being of our people. PPE will be required, as will social distancing, which we will accomplish via reduced density using staggered schedules, shifts, etc., and enhanced cleaning protocols. Things will look different for sure, but our people and their creativity haven't changed – and they won't. There's little certainty these days, but I'm sure of that!

You are a business leader who has always focused on your people and believed that talent makes great companies. How proud are you to see how IPG's workforce has risen during this most difficult time and what do you say to your team about their perseverance and resilience?

I absolutely cannot say enough about our employees. This is an absolutely unprecedented time – with no blueprint and no plan. Our employees have not skipped a beat. I hear from everyone regularly – some more so than ever before. Our teams, if anything, are working more closely together, and in many cases, harder and more effectively than ever. As I said, we've won business, produced terrific work and strengthened client relationships during this time. It's a testament to our talent and their resilience.

Leading companies in all industries have changed the way they operate and have been engaged in providing talent, resources and supplies to those on the front lines of this crisis. This has provided an example of the role that business plays as a force for good in society. Will you discuss your views on the responsibility that leading companies have to address societal need?

Addressing societal need – having a commitment to purpose – is something I have always believed in, and certainly is a most important part of IPG's DNA. IPG's commitment to the communities where its employees live and work is critical, as is our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. We have been committed to these values for many years, but now there is more urgency than ever before to act on our values. We are committed to doing just that. ●

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