

Excellence in Execution

An Interview with **Jim Porçarelli**,
Chief Strategy Officer

EDITORS' NOTE *Jim Porçarelli has nearly 25 years of advertising and strategic marketing experience with agencies such as MediaCom and the former DMB&B (now Publicis).*



Jim Porçarelli

How has the economic crisis over the past 24 months affected Active?

There's no doubt that the economic crisis has affected Active, but not in ways one would expect. The foundation of our business model has been further validated as many companies have looked to us as a resource over the past 24 months. Companies that might not have considered corporate trade in the past are now in discussions to include us as a resource. However, the economic issues confronting business have taken their toll on the decision-making process. Everyone is a little more circumspect about making decisions. It's taking longer to get decisions that, in the past, had been given much more quickly. Predictability has become even more important in this new environment.

Is the value that Active can bring, and the fact that it's a high-level strategy decision, well understood in the market?

It's well understood by those people who have participated in corporate trade in the past and who have experienced the results. It's probably not as well understood by those who haven't used corporate trade or by those who remember its roots.

The global branding initiative that we launched a few months ago has begun to connect us with people who either don't know of us or have been apprehensive. We're on our way to a higher degree of recognition and engagement.

Is your focus still predominantly the U.S. or do you foresee strong opportunities internationally?

We definitely see great strength in the emerging markets. Some of our offices around the world have already enjoyed substantial success versus last year.

What is happening in the U.K., Germany, Australia, and Asia are indicators that our opportunity goes way beyond our traditional base in the United States.

The U.S. clearly is the biggest office at this juncture, but we're seeing an expansion of global business. There are more than a handful of areas where we are beginning to be looked at as a viable resource. There are several prospects in the works that offer multi-country opportunities for global brands. We find these prospects among the most exciting.

Active has been an innovator in this industry, but are more traditional media companies beginning to get into corporate trade?

Absolutely. Up to this point, there have been many advertising agencies that have not embraced corporate trade. Just in the past few months, several have made an attempt to launch their own programs. It reconfirms the value of the business model.

However, we have perfected this art over 26 years, and we've brought corporate trade to a much higher level. That is the reason many of our clients have not only embraced the idea but have been with us for an extended period of time.

It's also the reason why many new clients, who basically had non-barter policies, came to us first and expressed an interest in investigating what opportunities it would bring for them. And it spans many categories, from financial services to automotive to packaged goods to spirits.

It would seem that your ability to address excess assets might be most beneficial to specific industries. How broad is the range of industries Active focuses on?

There is almost no category we can't impact. The nature of our business model is about flexibility and the use of assets in ways that have not been previously employed. We don't see ourselves as just a tool to rectify a problem, although we absolutely do that. Whether we're delivering a multiple of the fair market value for assets and executing existing plans, or helping our client use our model to fund new programs or initiatives that otherwise might have been limited due to budget constraints, we provide an opportunity that more and more companies are exploring. Since there is no business that always

has enough money to do everything they would like, we help find ways to fund programs that were not affordable within "this" year's budget.

What is the right way to define the Active brand?

Our brand is defined by two things: partnership and results. In everything we do, in everything we say, our goal is to always live up to these two tenets. This is exemplified in the way we work with our clients and their agencies. However, we know we can't be all things to all people. There are times that the business model may not work perfectly for an organization, and we let them know that. We don't engage with clients unless there is a high predictability of excellence.

How has the media part of the business shifted in terms of what you're offering for digital media?

The word often used in the industry is tra-digital. Tra-digital implies that there is no such thing as just digital media anymore, because digital is now traditional media – it is what the communication world is now all about.

Digital is intrinsic to the work that we provide. More and more, clients are looking at overall communication plans – not just traditional plans versus digital plans. Mass media alone doesn't work anymore; each consumer designs his or her own media menus. It's incumbent upon advertisers to determine a communication plan that allows them to speak to consumers one-on-one, engage them, and convert them into loyal users.

We've integrated our media so that when our client's are discussing the best way to talk to their customers, we have a point of view that's relevant and informative and delivers results.

Will there be a role for print as you look down the road?

Any medium, be it print, broadcast, or out-of-home, has to recognize that the accrual of audience today is faster than ever before. They must understand what they need to do to capture that engagement quickly, because you only have one chance. Once you understand that dynamic, you can design a way for your medium to connect with the consumer so you will earn that accrual. So print will be a different medium than it is today, but it will have an important role in the communication process. Just as the digital world has impacted broadcast, the print world is now rethinking how it can exponentially affect consumer engagement. Once they figure that out, they too will have an equal seat at the table. ●