

LEADERS IN GLOBAL CORPORATE TRADING



Christian Kirschbaum

As Managing Director-Germany for Active International GmbH, Christian Kirschbaum brings corporate planning and development as well as sales and marketing experience to the growing German corporate trade market. Prior to joining Active, he held various management positions with Viterro Energy, the world leader in metering services.

How developed is Active's market in Germany?

In comparison to the U.S. market, Germany is definitely not that developed. Active started doing business in Germany in 1999 and has become a market leader with roughly 100-plus existing clients. So it's fruitful ground in terms of doing corporate trade.

Does the client base include a wide range of companies and industries or is it more focused on specific profiles?

We work with many different industries with the common issue of facing problems with underperforming or excess assets. This includes electronics, cosmetics, and publishing houses as well as the car industry, apparel, and food and beverages. It's a range of industries.

These services you provide have value in good and bad times. Can you elaborate on how that makes sense?

It boils down to the individual situation a company is in. In good times, companies are more likely to launch more innovations and be more proactive and aggressive in terms of the number of units they produce. In a depression or a recession, they may be more focused on streamlining their warehouse situation.

Each individual economic situation offers individual requirements and motivations for doing business with Active.

Is there close coordination in terms of Active's global footprint, not only in the U.S. but also internationally? And is the messaging and go-to-market platform similar?

We have progressed so that not only are we an international company with a global footprint and a global brand, but we are working more closely from an operational perspective across borders.

I had a meeting with a colleague from France to establish a business relationship with a company that has excess assets in Germany but needs our services in France. Active is heavily motivated to do cross-border offerings because it provides more options for our clients and further differentiates us since no other corporate trading company has this capability.

Is Active characterized as a media company?

I would classify our business as providing a financial solution that hinges around an excess or underperforming asset. While media is our largest service area, we also provide printing, travel, and event planning.

In Germany, for example, we have established a very strong multimillion-dollar printing business that is delivering catalogs, brochures, posters, and booklets to our clients. The scope of our business has developed far beyond media.

What excited you about this opportunity and has it been what you expected?

I was fascinated by a business model I had never heard of before joining Active.

When I joined Active in 2003, it had been established in Germany for three years and over the past seven or eight years I've been with the company, we have established a remarkable number of business relationships with blue chip companies and also with mid-sized companies. I've seen things develop that I hadn't expected at all. The creativity and the potential are huge. ●



Al Silverstein

As Chief Executive Officer-AudienceFUEL, Al Silverstein brings more than 15 years of on-line marketing and advertising experience to AudienceFUEL. He was most recently Senior Vice President of Corporate Strategy and Digital Practice Leader at Active International.

What did you see in the market that made you feel this was an offering that made sense?

Active has been very successful in addressing the needs of traditional broadcasters and publishers. This was an opportunity for us to create a platform that helped these same publishers capture new audiences and increase revenue in the digital space by exchanging unsold or underperforming ad inventory with each other.

Is your target market a certain size or is it more broad?

Our audience includes any digital publisher that has unsold or undervalued inventory and wants to grow their online audience. We help them to advertise and promote their site on other publisher sites. Instead of paying cash to buy inventory or traffic, they can trade.

How does the platform work?

The way we operate is on a real-time bidding platform, so publishers can bid for inventory using prices they feel comfortable with and they can set a limit for the lowest value they want to receive for their inventory using credits instead of cash. They have complete control over their inventory and their buys, and over what they spend, and the system does it automatically, giving them all the metrics to determine whether or not it's effective.

How close is the coordination within Active for what you're doing with AudienceFUEL?

Initially, there was very close coordination but as the business took shape, we set it up as a separate company so that we could be as nimble as possible and because we knew that we would be looking for strategic partners and investors.

Is the primary focus at this stage the U.S. market or are you focused overseas?

It will be a truly global offering; we have already begun discussions with international publishers. Up to 40 percent of a U.S. publisher's traffic comes from international locations and often U.S. publishers can't monetize that inventory effectively.

So we plan to provide a barter or trade platform for publishers that are looking to create more value from their international traffic by exchanging it for a domestic audience. For example, if you are coming from Germany but you're looking at the U.S. site, we could allow a German publisher to advertise on the U.S. site; and if we see a U.S. visitor at an international destination, we can serve them a U.S. publisher's ad.

How high up within the company does the relationship need to be with a publisher to communicate the value this can bring?

It is on a publisher to publisher basis, so for some publishers, we work directly with the ad operations group, which is responsible for traffic and optimization of their inventory; for others, we have to speak to somebody who oversees sales, marketing, or both. It depends on the publisher's structure.

Was building a company always of interest to you?

Absolutely. I was brought to Active to help the company embrace new technology and improve Active's digital footprint. This has been a great opportunity to leverage Active's successful business model and trading strengths while expanding into digital with an entrepreneurial mindset. ●