

LEADERS IN GLOBAL CORPORATE TRADING



Bill Georges

As President of Sales and Operations, Bill Georges is responsible for revenue growth at Active and brings more than 17 years marketing, advertising, and sales leadership experience to the company. Prior to joining Active in 2007, he was Senior Vice President, Advertising and Affiliate Sales for Comcast Networks.

Does the market understand the range of solutions that Active offers and how the business has grown?

When you talk about offerings, there's the product side, which includes media, travel, freight and logistics, and retail marketing, and the solution side where we can help people with business needs such as driving incremental sales, financing capital expenditures, exiting sponsorship obligations, and decreasing carrying costs. Our model enables us to offer solutions for all those things.

I don't think the marketplace is as aware of what we have beyond media. Some of that is because those areas are still growing for us and some of it is because whenever you talk about corporate trade or barter, people like to put it into that media box since historically that's what corporate trade companies, including Active, have focused on. But it has changed. Every day, we're looking at opportunities to partner with digital, hospitality, freight, and retail marketing; companies that will take and can utilize trade credits as payment for services.

Do you need to be dealing high up in those companies for that relationship?

Our business would not be what it is if it weren't for our ability to drive results. Having relationships with the people who have total P&L responsibility and can share a company-wide view of what they need allows us to change the dynamic from a transaction to a relationship, and that's when companies see the most value.

You provide value both in boom times and down times?

Certainly during difficult times, people are looking for a short-term solution and we help them with those needs. However, our value is not limited to short-term solutions. When we can become part of our client's business planning, that's when they are able to gain incremental benefits. For example, one of the biggest challenges manufacturers face is determining how much to produce. We helped one of our long-term clients, a leading lawn and garden company, address this issue by functioning as a "safety net" for them. They produce what they need in a best case scenario and if the weather impacts the sale of a particular product, we take that excess off their hands. In return, they place a portion of their media through us. This goes well beyond the transactional barter model and is effective in a good or bad economy.

How much of a focus is overseas growth?

In the states, some of the largest growth opportunities are in industries that haven't typically looked at barter, such as insurance and finance. Globally, we are growing our existing footprint and expanding into the BRIC countries, with the most focus on Brazil and China, and we're keeping our eye on Russia and India.

Is the competitive landscape changing?

New companies are entering the space as people finally recognize the value of corporate trade or barter, and that is helpful. The difficulty is when you have a lot of companies joining the space that don't fully understand how to trade or create that value. I worry that the real corporate trade model might get diminished and I worry about companies that say they're a corporate trade company but are not really trading. But with competitors, products tend to improve and that's good for the industry. ●



Barb Martino

As Executive Vice President in Client Development, Barb Martino is focused on supporting client initiatives through the use of corporate trade. She has more than 25 years of experience in marketing and advertising and was President and CEO of Grey Global Group's G-Whiz, a full-service advertising agency specializing in youth, entertainment, and lifestyle brands prior to joining Active.

Active is known for their long-term relationships. How do you lead in client interaction?

In the role of client service, it's the experience our clients have with us on a daily basis that drives our success and future engagement.

We're not in business to do deals that are more like one-time events with a beginning, middle, and end and then we're out; we're looking to form more strategic partnerships where corporate trade can best benefit them and solve some of their corporate challenges.

Is the value Active can bring well understood and how high up do you need to have the relationship so that value is clear?

It's not completely understood. Although we pride ourselves on delivering results and we do repeat business with a lot of major brands – some we've had in our portfolio for 10 to 15 years – there are times when we are challenged by a client who has had a bad experience in corporate trade.

Changing the perception that surrounds the industry is also a challenge we are focused on. Earning trust and creating a positive experience is paramount to forging that change.

Our relationships have multiple touch points on the client side – it might be the sales department, the finance department, the marketing group, or up to the C-Suite. Our job is to walk them through the process and make it as easy as possible to realize the value our model provides.

Have you been able to put metrics in place to evaluate results?

Absolutely. We buy our client's media based on the specs from their agency. So when our clients purchase media through us, we have to post on the buys the same way an agency would.

We also calculate an internal rate of return as well as P&Ls on our deals to make sure they're beneficial to both Active and our clients.

Are some of the more traditional media companies moving into this area?

Since I've been at Active, I've seen a few independent trading companies crop up as well as some of the larger media agencies coming on board. As they look to offer more diversified services and to create more revenue streams for themselves, they're recognizing that corporate trade can be a way to replace some lost income.

As far as we're concerned, our success and our client portfolio speaks for itself. Although these new companies continue to legitimize the industry, it will take time before these newcomers can build the trading relationships and asset remarketing capabilities, and deliver on the value clients have come to expect.

How does Active work with a client and their agency to ensure they get the most value?

Each client has a dedicated client development team member assigned to their business. They are responsible for understanding the client's goals and at the same time integrating into the processes already in place with their agency. Our team is comprised of professionals from within and outside of the industry so we are comfortable working with just about any executive in any category. Once we understand our client's objectives, communication and measurement are critical, so our approach incorporates multiple touch points throughout the relationship. ●