

Media, Technology and Services

An Interview with Erica Holborn, President, SANDOW

EDITORS' NOTE Erica Holborn has been the President of SANDOW since September 2015 and, prior to that, she served as the company's Chief Strategy Officer. Previously, Holborn spent 16 years building TrialGraphix into the nation's leading litigation support provider, having started at the company as an account manager and quickly climbing the ranks to become President & COO in 2002. After managing the sale of TrialGraphix first to private equity and then to Kroll Ontrack, a division of Marsh McLennan at the time, she became Vice President and Operating Director.



Erica Holborn

COMPANY BRIEF Founded in 2003 by visionary entrepreneur Adam I. Sandow, SANDOW's (sandow.com) diverse portfolio encompasses various media titles (including Interior Design, NewBeauty, Luxe Interiors + Design, and Galerie), fashion brand Fred Segal, global materials consultancy, Material ConneXion and game-changing technology and logistics platform, Material Bank. Its leading media brands have served as a platform for the company to launch innovative tools and services that benefit both the consumer and professional audiences. The company's global headquarters are in New York City with corporate headquarters in Boca Raton, Florida.

How do you define SANDOW's business and how broad is its focus?

We're definitely not a traditional media company, nor does SANDOW typically take a traditional approach to anything we do. When I describe the business today, I refer to us as a media, technology and services business. We have expanded quite a bit since Adam launched his first brand under the SANDOW umbrella in 2005.

We're a business that thinks differently about the ways we develop content and provide solutions to the markets we serve.

There are two common denominators to everything we do, which are luxury and design – even our beauty and fashion brands encompass this. We leverage the media platforms that we have built, either through organic start-ups or strategic acquisitions, to launch new businesses that provide solutions and connect our partners with their target audiences through tools, experiences or services.

From a pure media perspective, we continue to believe strongly in print and have not waived on our investment in this medium, but we understand the value of diverse content platforms. We have highly engaged digital and social audiences – our design brands alone have a combined reach of nearly 10M on social media – and we produce hundreds of events across our brands each year. We also manage very successful awards programs in the design and beauty industries.

Is there close coordination between SANDOW's brands or do they operate independently?

A little bit of both. Each brand has its own authoritative position and is a leader in its own right, but we do look at the brands very much as an ecosystem built by SANDOW. I can give countless examples of how partners that we work with have taken advantage of our content channels, as well as our consulting services, and technology and logistics businesses. There are many synergies and intersections across our brands that add value to our clients, and in that regard, we do work together.

We like to look at a client, understand what their objectives are, and then reverse engineer a plan using the assets we have here, which really tie together nicely.

Of course, there are clients that simply partner with one of our brands, so it really depends on the situation.

Is brand awareness important for SANDOW or is it more critical to build awareness around the individual brands?

We have always focused more on building individual brands and we've done a very good job at that. However, going forward, building the SANDOW brand will become more important, and we will make more concerted efforts in that regard, particularly as it relates to our design assets. It's always very important to Adam to be selective in how we do this and to ensure that the strategy and messaging is thoughtful.

As we continue to build innovative solutions for the design industry, SANDOW is developing a reputation as a leader in this arena, with a number of assets under that umbrella. For the design assets specifically, SANDOW is a brand that is already recognized and will continue to become even more so.

What are the keys to remaining relevant in print today and is print still a key component for SANDOW?

It's absolutely still a key component. We look at print as a luxury item and, in some ways, the growth of digital has put print on a pedestal as a more indulgent and trusted form of content.

With the type of publications we produce, print provides engagement and a level of credibility that is still highly valued by the audiences we serve. Our audiences include the most affluent consumers, executive-level decision-makers and design professionals. These audiences continue to need and want to be engaged at a high level, and print allows for that.

Is custom publishing a growth area for SANDOW?

I see it as a growth area because our clients are increasingly interested in custom content, such as custom publications or advertorials that we create for them that they can then distribute either through our channels or theirs.

We produce more design publications than any other media company right now – over 100 issues per year. Therefore, our knowledge of that audience and our understanding of what resonates with them is quite unique and unmatched.

If we can bring that knowledge and help our clients tell their stories in ways that might be outside of our publications or digital platforms, then we want to be able to do that.

I see growth in helping brands build their images and tell their stories.

What makes the relationship between you and Adam work so well?

The relationship that I have with Adam is a good example of why it's important to build a team with diverse experiences and expertise. Adam and I think similarly about the core values of the business, but he is perhaps the most innovative and creative individual I've ever met. I'm a good balance for that, because I'm strong on the operational and people side of the business.

I'm focused more on day to day execution, particularly with our design media assets, and working closely with leadership to translate Adam's goals and vision into what we're producing here.

I knew it would be a good relationship because our strengths are complementary, and we have the same fundamental philosophies about what is important for the business. ●