

Active International

International Capabilities

An Interview with Gemma Atkinson,
Chief Operating Officer, International Division, Active International

COMPANY BRIEF With 35 years of experience, Active International (activeinternational.com) is a global financial solutions company that drives performance and improves business outcomes for leading brands. A data-driven company, with media as a core competency, Active operates a full-service omnichannel media agency. In addition to media, Active brings to bear a broad portfolio of competencies such as Asset Disposition/Merchandise Sales, Real Estate, Retail Marketing, Travel and Hospitality, Freight & Logistics, and Lighting. Through the application of its core business model, Active is able to create financial benefits to serve its clients. Active International is based in New York and has offices in 15 countries.

“My belief has always been that culture starts from the very top and, today, culture has become a corporate strategy. In our knowledge-based society, companies require their staffs to be more diverse than ever before. I’ve found that companies that support and encourage diversity are better-rounded and, thus, better poised to serve a diverse marketplace.”

**Alan Elkin,
Chairman & CEO,
Active International**



Gemma Atkinson

EDITORS’ NOTE Gemma Atkinson joined Active International in 2011 as Head of Business Development, where she developed and implemented sales strategies for advertisers and media agencies. Since June 2018, Atkinson has been International COO and is responsible for helping to set strategy and develop long-term partnerships.

Will you discuss your focus as International COO for Active?

As COO, I spend 50 percent of my time working on the U.K. operation and the other 50 percent focused on developing our international network, which reaches across Europe, Australia, Canada and Mexico.

Our International ambition is to be the corporate trade company of choice, both for our expertise and the way we work. Across International we are committed to investing in our people and developing a culture that celebrates creativity and collaboration.

Our expertise is located across many sectors and we do not fit neatly into one box. This means our breadth and depth of experience enables us to flex, adapt and lead in a changing landscape.

How do you see Active’s future?

The future is full of both possibility and opportunity. After 35 years of global success, we are looking forward to continuing to deliver commercial innovation for our partners.

In the immediate term across International, we are excited to be working on the development of a three-year plan which focuses on our key operating framework. To achieve more and amplify positive business outcomes for our partners, we need to ruthlessly prioritize. Our focus is on building and maintaining meaningful relationships with partners of today and of tomorrow. We will listen to understand and then act. We are borne of entrepreneurs and we want to build a company that continues to think and act in that way every day with every opportunity.

Is there still an education process in international markets when it comes to understanding Active’s services and solutions?

The education process will always be important to Active, and we want people to work with us because they fully understand our offering. When we meet with clients around the table, with representatives across functions from marketing, procurement, financial and sales, understanding is the key ingredient to a great relationship.

We want people to challenge us and bring us into their business opportunities and challenges.

We have spent a significant amount of time over the past two years in the U.K. going out to our agencies, clients and media partners to ascertain how Corporate Trade can help accelerate their businesses. The more we understand their business, the more we can deliver material and meaningful solutions.

We have spent time across the countries refining our internal values and understanding how these can galvanize people to think about what is possible.

One of the values that resonates with me, and that demonstrates how Active continues to transform, is creativity. The team at Active has the creativity to wrestle with ideas, to stimulate different ways of thinking about challenges and opportunities and to arrive at solutions that add value through insight.

Simon Sinek has a quote that I think sums up our approach to our leadership, to our talent, to our culture and to our business practice: “Leadership is not about being in charge, leadership is about taking care of those in your charge.” ●

A Commercial Innovation Company

An Interview with Lisa Brown,
Global Chief Strategy and Chief Business Development Officer,
Active International



Lisa Brown

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to joining Active in 2012, Lisa Brown served as CEO of Richard Petty Motorsports, CEO of Maverick Communications, President of Interactive Marketing for AOL, CEO and President of Electronic Commerce Solutions a IAC company, and Senior Vice President, Group Sales and Marketing for TeleRep, Inc., a Cox Communication company.

How do you define the Active of today?

Active was formed 35 years ago with the mission of offering a differentiated, scalable and client centric form of corporate barter and trade. Our trades create spread, and we use that spread to create financial benefits to clients, and we derive our profits from the utilization of our spread. We are a no-fee model and we continue to be the leader in that area today.

Given our FORTUNE 50 client base and established trust, we have since evolved to a commercial innovation company, which now involves utilizing our trading model to provide our clients customized solutions that improve their bottom lines at scale.

Our client-centric approach has led to the development of a suite of products and services that go way beyond the borders of what would be known as corporate trade.

We now describe ourselves as a commercial innovation company, because we believe we have developed products and services that are quite innovative and that change business outcomes for brands and allow them to innovate while they operate.

How important has it been to engage those who have worked at Active for many years in this transformation?

We believe that we have become a best-in-class corporate trade company and the leader in corporate trade simply because of our people and the ability to execute.

Prior to an official launch, we spent two years working with our more than 600 employees worldwide and getting their thoughts and buy-in so that they are completely comfortable with our transformation and our evolution into a commercial innovation company.

For instance, our media practice, which was designed to provide fulfillment support to corporate trade transactions, is now a full-service media agency with everything from data, analytics and planning capabilities through to measurements and optimization. It serves both our clients and our agency partners.

Will you discuss Active's culture of being entrepreneurial and disruptive?

Developing the type of corporate trade company Alan (Elkin, CEO) developed stems from not only the model but also the leadership.

Alan and Arthur (Wagner, President) are the type of executives who are completely open to entrepreneurial ideas and, thus, attract people who are entrepreneurial and keenly interested in staying ahead of the marketplace.

In a world of disruption, Active is certainly a disruptor. When Alan and Arthur started the company, they came up with an idea for corporate trade and barter that was differentiated from the competition. They started the business with that disruptive notion 35 years ago.

We have a company where being entrepreneurial and disruptive in an effort to serve clients in a more distinctive way is in our DNA. This makes us uniquely suited to deal with the disruptive marketplace that businesses are dealing with today.

Client centricity has also always been in our DNA. We have a group of people that like to be able to offer very smart and entrepreneurial ideas that are designed to change business outcomes for our clients as we also do it for ourselves. ●

Legal Expertise

An Interview with Dayna Frank,
General Counsel, Active International



Dayna Frank

EDITOR'S NOTE Dayna Frank is General Counsel for Active International and provides legal counsel and support to Active's global offices, including contract negotiation, litigation, subsidiary creation, new product launches, and policies and procedures. She also serves as Secretary to Active. She joined the company in 1996. Frank earned her L.L.M. in International Business Law, with merit, from the London School of Economics and Political Science. She received her law degree from New York Law School and a B.A. from the University of Buffalo. Frank is licensed in NY and NJ and is a member of the American Bar Association and the New York Bar Association.

How do you define the role of General Counsel at Active?

It's very broad – the legal department pervades the entire company, from any of its new ventures to its branding and its global outreach. We do an analysis of the legal business risks when we're looking at moving into a new area. If we're looking at acquiring a company, we will evaluate how it fits into our overall company and do an analysis of the structure of the company to determine whether it will fit into the business as a subsidiary or an affiliate. We also help structure how we acquire new businesses.

Intellectual property is also under the purview of the general counsel, so we protect the Active brand on a global basis through trademarks and registrations as well as patents and copyrights.

Has the general counsel role become more complex as Active has expanded?

I don't know that it has become more complex, but I tell my colleagues that being an attorney working at Active is fascinating. I work with brilliant, creative people who find solutions to problems and I have to provide the legal drafts around their work to ensure that we are protected.

How do you define Active's business as the company has evolved?

I've always defined Active as a financial solutions company – we had Active Capital and we were doing structured finance from early on.

It's just that when we do our initial pitch and try to explain what Active does, barter comes up. People could see that as a bad word, but it's the oldest way of doing business and it's easy for someone to fundamentally understand that.

Our structures are all around financial solutions. Corporate trade and barter are financial solutions – it's how we package it that makes it a more sophisticated package. At day's end, though, it's corporate trade and a financial solution.

Active was built with an entrepreneurial spirit. Will you discuss the entrepreneurial culture at Active and is that harder to maintain at the size and scale of the company today?

It's harder to manage from the general counsel's office. It has always been the hardest issue for legal to manage. It's an administrative nightmare trying to manage the facts, the inventory and the solutions.

However, the entrepreneurial spirit is what makes it fun and client-centric and what drives us to be the leader in the industry.

All the questions that come up make my job harder but more fun. In the end, it's all about what the client needs and what the company needs to grow. ●

Agency Partnerships

An Interview with Bethany Harris,
Executive Vice President, Strategic Partnerships, Active International



Bethany Harris

EDITORS' NOTE Bethany Harris joined Active in 2009 and has overseen Active's business development operations strategies, as well as revenue analytics across the products offered to clients through Active's trading model. In this role she liaises sales, client services, agency relationships, Active's various product units and operations. With 18 years of agency and client-side experience prior to joining Active, Harris' background includes working with brands such as Hasbro, Dairy Queen, W Hotels, Tropicana and SoBe Lifewater. Her agency roles were at Grey Advertising, G-Whiz Youth and Entertainment Marketing and The Arnell Group and on the client side, she was the Consumer Marketing Director at Penguin Publishing.

Will you discuss your new role leading Agency Partnerships for Active?

I oversee how Active partners with agencies to jointly bring more value to our clients. We also help agencies in other ways by providing services or capabilities that they might not be able to provide themselves. Active also helps agencies understand the marketplace a bit more, as we have a very unique purview given we are inside so many agencies and clients.

How important is it when building relationships with the agencies that Active is seen as a partner and not a replacement for their employees?

It's critical. I've been on the agency side and understand how strange it feels to have someone come in and start executing your buys. I find going into the agencies, explaining how the barter model works and taking them through how it's particularly going to work for their client is key. Once they see what it can do for their clients, it's easy for them to get on board and be a part of it. They also understand that they maintain control over the buys.

Agencies often see us as a threat, and we don't want that – we want them to understand we're working together. The important thing is for them to provide us with the media specifications they would have presented to their clients without us and for us to meet those specifications while allowing their clients to pay in trade or to find another scenario that will create savings for that client.

The more the agencies see what value we lend to their clients and what more the clients can do, the easier it becomes to work with them. In best cases, they will introduce us to more of their clients.

Active is a metric focused company. In these agency partnerships, how critical is it to track impact and show the value that Active is bringing?

It's critical, because we usually start off with a test and we need to prove ourselves. It's nice because Active can always prove its value with a calculator. As this happens, clients work more and more with Active. It works.

That is why we carefully analyze upfront how much value we can create, then as we start working on their business we monitor how closely we can meet or beat that value. We also provide them clear reporting on the value created for each client.

What are your key priorities as you look to the future?

The first focus is managing the clients and making sure they're seeing meaningful value.

We're finding that as more agencies work with us, they like us. We perform really well and there is a lot of trust built and they want to work more with us.

We're growing those agency services going forward based on what the agencies are telling us they need. ●

Financial Planning and Analysis

An Interview with Lana Ilchenko,
Senior Vice President of Global Financial Planning and Analysis,
Active International



Lana Ilchenko

EDITORS' NOTE Lana Ilchenko joined Active International in 2003 as part of the media team. In 2005, she moved to the finance department where she had a variety of roles until eventually becoming Head of U.K. Finance. She completed industry training to specialize in the financial side of the business and is an FCCA qualified accountant. She started developing an FP&A role for the International division 3 years ago with her current role of SVP, Global FP&A starting in 2018. Ilchenko graduated in 2000 in Ukraine with a master's degree in international economics, before moving to the U.K., and also holds an MBA from Edinburgh Business School.

What attracted you to the finance side of Active's business and what is the focus for financial planning and analysis?

Active was my first job. I started on the media side where I learned how the business was operated. I then became a media trader in our U.K. office. However, my training is in finance and Active's business model is so fascinating that I wanted to experience the finance side of it.

Since I started in media and understood how the commercial side of the operation worked together with my finance experience, Active gave me an opportunity to work with our International Division leadership to develop a new area – financial planning and analysis.

I began doing this for the U.K. office and have since been tasked with expanding this to other international offices, culminating in making a move to the U.S. to handle this role on a global level.

Is technology playing a major role in how you are conducting analysis and will you discuss the investments Active has made in technology?

We have a dedicated IT department that builds much of our technology in-house, mainly because of our very complex business model. We can't buy software off the shelf. If we do, we still have to adapt it to our business model.

Our original objective was to make sure we could capture information from every office globally and apply it to satisfying the local clients' needs. Once that was achieved, we then invested in platforms to capture all of this global information to analyze and use it to predict the future and make our clients' lives easier going forward.

How does financial planning and analysis help provide customized solutions for clients?

The most important motto for this company is "helping clients achieve more," which is the whole reason behind this new role. We work with our clients to understand what the problems are and then try to resolve them.

We don't always know in advance what the problem is going to be. However, creativity at every single Active office is deeply encouraged. Even though we have a basic business model, it evolves as necessary.

The solutions we offer clients are completely tailored to those clients. The issue is collecting the data and making sure we can have a system that will process all of it and make our planning for the future easier. Until recently, we didn't have a coordinated approach to collecting all the data on everything we do.

That is where I have come in. I have been asked to make sure that we can collect the data, analyze what we do and, as a result, make better decisions for ourselves and for our clients going forward.

It's a work in progress. It has been streamlined, but because ours is a complex business model, there is a lot of work still to be done. ●

Creating Leverage

An Interview with Melissa Keller,
Executive Vice President, National Media, Active International



Melissa Keller

EDITORS' NOTE *Melissa Keller assumed her current post in May 2016. Prior to this, she was Executive Vice President-Channel Investments for Havas Media from July 2007.*

You spent much of your career on the agency side of the media business. What excited you about joining Active and has it been what you expected?

Active International takes a very different approach from an agency – however, the goal of delivering value to clients and being a good media vendor partner is the same. What excited me about joining Active was their ability to create leverage on both sides: media vendors and media clients. Active's ability to marry the two sides in a successful model has been around for more than 30 years. When every major agency holding company now has a trading arm, you know the model works.

What surprised me was the dizzying array of all we offer and our ability to create leverage for quality media through everything from securing hotel rooms, in store retail pop-ups, helicopters, jets, building leases, entertainment boxes at arenas, buying unsold inventory, to furniture for new office space. Active can help companies with access to anything in exchange for access to quality inventory or the ability to place your media schedule in quality media.

How is Active adapting to the evolving media landscape?

Active is very astute at noticing trends in the marketplace and evolving with them. Our tool kit of offerings is ever expanding to serve our clients and deliver value through leverage.

Because of the unique space we occupy with a well-rounded client roster matched against an impressive list of media vendors, we are able to see where emerging areas are taking shape and gaining traction early. This unique position allows us to get in early and create leverage and remain relevant to our clients on both the advertiser and vendor partner sides.

Will you provide an overview of Active's media capabilities?

From a trading perspective, Active International offers the broadest range of capabilities in the marketplace from traditional linear TV, to audio, local, OOH, print, DR, and unwired to media disciplines under the wide umbrellas of digital and advanced TV.

How broad is Active's client base in media and where do you see the greatest opportunities for growth?

We have a robust cross section of clients including those from QSR, CPG, travel, lawn and garden, retail, auto care, etc. – we cover a pretty expansive number of categories.

From a growth in offerings perspective – I'm still a TV girl at heart and believe in the power of immediate reach and the brand building capabilities live TV delivers. What's interesting is watching brands that were started in the digital only space realize that in order to take their business to the next level they need to invest in brand awareness tactics. We all know that TV struggles with measurement, but not with content. Measurement is not getting remedied fast enough for the marketplace, but we can't let the pursuit of perfection hold up smart work for our clients. While we are already working in audience-based buying, addressable, OTT and VOD, a much greater emphasis will be placed there.

From an advertising client perspective, I don't really see any category that is off limits based on our model – if you have a need, we can help you. ●

Operational Excellence

An Interview with Liz Margolis,
Executive Vice President, Corporate Operations and Planning,
Active International



Liz Margolis

EDITORS' NOTE *Liz Margolis is responsible for leading operational activities for Active's U.S. Operation. She joined Active in 1992 as a media assistant and has advanced into positions with increased responsibility, including Media Coordinator, Buyer, Account Director, Systems & Operations Manager, and Associate Director of Media Operations. Most recently, she was SVP, Director of Media Operations. She received a B.A. with a specialty in international business from St. Thomas Aquinas College.*

Will you discuss your career progression at Active and how your role has evolved?

When I first started, the company only had about 70 employees. I started in an entry-level position as a media assistant. Through the years, we grew at a rapid pace and as we evolved into new areas of focus, we had to also institute new ways of reporting and transacting. My role evolved as we grew. Most of the positions I have held have been self-created based on the evolving needs of the organization.

I was at the forefront of deciding what processes and improvements we needed, which naturally led to me running the overall operations of the organization.

How critical has it been for your role to have close collaboration with Active's business leaders and to be a part of business strategy?

It's vital. I have earned the trust of my colleagues because they understand that my focus is on growth, innovation and the development of others. My role spans from technology to all facets of the organization today. It's critical that all parties align on the growth strategies we have, and that we have a well-documented plan that has buy-in from all levels. It is very important that we develop the tools to support these growth strategies.

How do you define Active's business today?

We provide customized solutions for organizations. We position ourselves with the client at the forefront of how we operate. We are here to help our clients achieve more. Corporate trade is within our DNA and it is the backbone of what we do daily. However, we are much more than that; we build deep relationships with our clients and media vendors in an effort to deliver solutions and insights that are valuable and actionable.

How meaningful it is to be part of a company that values diversity, especially for young people joining Active?

I share my experience at Active with everyone so they can see what is possible. All employees have the potential to grow. If they're good, solid workers who are diligent and go the extra mile, the company will be good to them.

When it comes to diversity, the company chooses to focus on who is best qualified for the job. In Active's case, there are a lot of women who are qualified and are empowered to share ideas for the growth of the company.

What are your priorities going forward and are you happy with the progress you have made in your role at Active?

I don't know that I will ever be satisfied. With technology changing so fast, something that worked six months ago might not be the best solution any longer. We have to continuously look at the processes, infrastructure and talent and evaluate whether we're still as effective as we need to be. ●

Media Capabilities

An Interview with Melissa Moschetti, Senior Vice President, Local & Unwired Media, and Senior Vice President and Managing Director, XACTV Network, Active International



Melissa Moschetti

EDITORS' NOTE *Melissa Moschetti joined Active International in September 2006 as an account coordinator and media buyer and then progressed through a number of roles within the company. She graduated from Fordham University's College of Business Administration with a B.S. in business with concentrations in marketing, management and globalization.*

Will you discuss your role at Active and how you focus your efforts?

I sit in our media division, leading teams in our local television and radio, as well as the unwired group.

My teams work with our clients and agency partners to deliver on their full media objectives while driving the financial solution possible by Active's trade model.

I am fortunate to work with a team of media professionals who are dedicated to implementing and delivering around the clock on behalf of all of our clients.

Will you discuss the opportunities that Active's Unwired platform presents?

We constantly look at the media industry, and how media is being transacted and consumed; this led to our creation of a product that would help marketers and advertisers solve some of the challenges that they faced in the media landscape, namely increasing costs and declining ratings.

We found that we could access local inventory commercial time that runs in each of the different markets and piece it all together to create a national footprint, providing marketers with a different way to buy media. This eases the cost issue because it creates more inventory. As to ratings, we ensure our marketers 100 percent delivery, because we can plan for it with our technology.

We learned quickly that we could build the early business in Excel but certainly we could not scale it that way. We invested in technology and developed a proprietary platform that allows for our clients to transact in this space with ease and transparency. This is an example of Active's goal to Achieve More for our clients.

Are the full range of Active's capabilities and the size and scale of its media power and influence well understood?

Active definitely has a great reputation as a leader in the corporate trading arena. Our immense capabilities are probably less understood than we'd like, which we are addressing.

How valuable is it to maintain an entrepreneurial culture that has always been at the core of Active?

It's invaluable. The leaders here have always given me lots of leeway, and it's led to many great ideas for our marketers, one of which is XACTV. They ask for my input in figuring out how to make ideas work, and we have a two-way conversation. Entrepreneurship is present throughout the organization: if someone has an idea, it can easily be surfaced.

In our group we often say that no one is smarter than everyone, so if someone is the only one talking, then we're not going to get the best ideas or outcomes. We really foster that concept and ensure that everyone shares what they're seeing from their interactions with clients, partners and vendors.

If we don't continue to do that every day, we'll become stagnant. Active was founded by entrepreneurs so that spirit is strong here. ●

Travel Solutions

An Interview with Elizabeth A. Topazio, President and Chief Legal Officer, Active Travel



Elizabeth A. Topazio

EDITORS' NOTE *Elizabeth A. Topazio is President and Chief Legal Officer of Active Travel, a division of Active International. She has more than 25 years of business and legal experience negotiating and structuring corporate trading transactions. Prior to joining Active in 1994, she was an M&A associate at Orloff, Louenbach in New Jersey from 1992 to 1994, and at Dechert LLP in Pennsylvania from 1988 to 1992. Topazio is a member of the New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania bars and graduated from Villanova University Law School with a J.D., cum laude, and Georgetown University, Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service with a B.S.F.S., magna cum laude. She participates in a variety of charitable endeavors and is on the Advisory Board for Animal Alliance of New Jersey.*

Will you discuss the solutions Active Travel provides and how these offerings have evolved to the current needs of clients?

Active Travel uses corporate trading to provide commercially agile solutions for its hospitality clients so that they can achieve more. Generally speaking, our hospitality clients include travel suppliers (predominately hotel owners, REITs, and management companies as well as airlines, rental car companies and cruise lines), major hotel brands, and company clients purchasing travel. Since for the past 8 years the hospitality industry has enjoyed a trend of record growth and increasing ADR and occupancy, while at the same time having to adapt to significant marketplace disruptors, including emerging digital technologies and evolving consumer mindsets and behaviors, we have had to continually adapt our solutions to stay aligned with our clients' respective evolving needs, challenges and goals.

For our travel supplier clients, which historically engaged in traditional corporate trading by using their unoccupied/unsold inventory as "in kind" payment for needed media, goods and services, we have evolved an "all cash" corporate trading solution which shifts market share/new cash business (transient and new corporate groups) into their hotels at normal ADR to increase RevPAR. For hotel brands, which for the most part no longer own their hotels, Active Travel has evolved corporate trading solutions which extend their brand media budgets at no additional costs or which fund programs benefiting their franchisees. For company clients purchasing travel, which mainly continue to seek solutions to extend their budgets and deliver savings, we have evolved to accommodate the various internal and external digital platforms utilized by them when purchasing travel goods and services.

Are there standard solutions that Active Travel offers or are these offerings tailored for the specific client need?

On the whole, solutions are constantly evolving and being customized. At present, broadly speaking, clients purchasing travel want savings, and travel suppliers want increased profits. How we deliver the value to both is where the creativity comes into play, especially since one would think it would be impossible to deliver savings to purchasers while at the same time higher profits to suppliers. Since corporate trading at its core is a flexible derivative financial model, we are able to structure solutions to deliver seamlessly the distinct value desired by both.

Is there close coordination between Active Travel and the other parts of Active's business?

Active Travel is an integral part of the offerings provided by the company's media and sales teams to their clients and was established as a core offering at the inception of the company. Over time, the company significantly expanded and evolved additional offerings. By working in close coordination with and drawing upon the collective expertise and creativity of the company at large, we have been able to rapidly and proactively evolve and remain relevant to our respective clients. ●