

Providing Analysis

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



Lana Ilchenko

EDITORS' NOTE Lana Ilchenko is a qualified accountant, currently leading the Global FP&A function at Active International. She started her career at Active International in 2003 and performed a large variety of roles in Media and Finance before taking on FP&A responsibilities within the International division and eventually globally. In addition to her professional accounting qualification, she also holds a masters' degree in international economic relations as well as an M.B.A. from the Edinburgh Business School.

Will you provide an overview of your role and key areas of focus?

I'm involved in running the annual budgeting process and producing regular forecasts that show the expected future performance of the business in the immediate term as well as 3-5 years' time. The main focus is to provide the analysis of business trends and past results, advise on how the company performance can be improved and explore potential growth scenarios, including via mergers and acquisitions.

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

In the past few years, the department has been focusing on the data that has been accumulated over a long period of time. The analysis of this data provides valuable insights into our clients' needs which depend, among other things, on the industry they are in, the stage of their evolution as a business and their specific marketing strategy. Having an in-depth understanding of our clients, what has or hasn't worked in the past and the specific solutions they could adopt, allows us to join them on their journey and become true collaboration partners, helping them succeed and reach their goals.

The global pandemic has impacted all companies and countries. How proud are you to see the way Active's workforce has shown strength and resilience during this challenging and uncertain time?

A situation like a global pandemic the likes of which has not been seen for 100 years is an unprecedented one to find oneself in, personally and as a business. Even though an event like this and the magnitude of its impact is impossible to foresee, the company was incredibly well-equipped to face it head on. The transition to remote working and eventual lockdown conditions was incredibly smooth, with no interruptions, and huge credit needs to go to people within the company who made it happen. It's the human side of it that impressed me the most and made me truly happy to be an Activian – from providing means of easily staying in touch and connecting to paying close attention not to just physical, but also the mental well-being of everyone. Like everyone else, I will of course be incredibly happy to see the end of the pandemic, but at the same time I am glad I have experienced it alongside my colleagues who showed strength and determination, a relentless and sometimes unimaginable work ethic and, importantly, also offered support and emotional connection. I truly felt that I was and still am a lot closer to my colleagues despite being physically apart. ●

An Entrepreneurial Spirit

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



Liz Margolis

EDITORS' NOTE Liz Margolis leads operational activities for Active's U.S. departments, both revenue producing as well as the corporate groups. With a deep understanding of media, technology and finance, she focuses on efficiency and effectiveness for internal and client-facing processes. Margolis joined Active in 1992 as a media assistant and has advanced into positions with growing responsibility, including Media Coordinator, Buyer, Account Director, Systems & Operations Manager, and Associate Director of Media Operations. Most recently, she was Senior Vice President, Director of Media Operations. She received a B.A. with a specialty in international business from St. Thomas Aquinas College.

Will you provide an overview of your role and key areas of focus?

I establish, in conjunction with the COO, strategic objectives and operating policies with regard to the revenue producing groups to enhance profitability, growth and personnel development. My key areas of focus include leading the development of the annual budget for the U.S. teams from revenue down to net income, as well as continuously focusing on future forecasts for the U.S.-based team which helps to dictate how to deploy resources and investments in both people and product.

Within the data and analytics area, I utilize past and present data to gain insights in order to forecast future trends and predictable outcomes to enhance forecasts and ultimately business decisions. Further, I manage a team to develop and analyze systems and reports to accurately evaluate all revenue generating activity to determine that the department's goals and objectives are being met, and to maximize spread and margin within each group.

In the technology arena, I work alongside the IT professionals to continue to refine systems and processes to gain efficiency as well as to adapt to a changing marketplace.

You started working at Active when the company only had about 70 employees, As Active has grown in size and scale, how important has it been for the company to maintain its entrepreneurial spirit and focus on innovation?

I believe it is a key element of our success. Our employees are encouraged to not only see the problem, but see the opportunity that solving that problem brings. New ideas emerge that may not have been thought possible. It is a mindset that our staff needs to have and we all must be actively thinking about change and how to adapt to a media marketplace that is continually evolving. However, you cannot ignore the element of risk that this mindset brings with it. An entrepreneurial spirit takes calculated risk allowing employees to think outside the box and think about different approaches that are unique and diverse. Especially given the pandemic that we are experiencing right now, if you do not focus on innovation and how to adapt to an uncertain market, I believe you will be left behind your competition.

For me personally, my journey has been a continuous evolution, as most of the positions I have held at Active were self-created based on a need the company had as well as the trust in me that I could continue to meet the challenge to grow and develop what was needed to continue with the evolution and growth of Active. ●