

Collaboration, Coordination and Cooperation

An Interview with Alan S. Elkin, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Active International

EDITORS' NOTE *Alan Elkin co-founded Active International in 1984. Elkin began his career at Kaiser Broadcasting which, under his direction as Senior Vice President of Sales, later became Field Communications and then a subsidiary of Katz Media Group. He has received the Entrepreneur Of The Year™ Award by Ernst & Young and the British American Business Inc. Award in recognition of Active's global accomplishments. Additionally, he received the 2019 Lifetime Achievement Award at the Broadcasting and Cable Hall of Fame annual gala. Elkin believes that community involvement is as important as business leadership and through the company's Active Cares program, contributions have been made to over 600 charities since 1997.*



Alan S. Elkin

What have been the keys to Active's strength and leadership in the industry and how do you define the Active difference?

Our people – they are our greatest asset and their commitment keeps us on top in our industry. Our team values focus on collaboration, coordination and cooperation. Our strength is in our ability to communicate with each other. We create solutions and solve client challenges together. Like any team in a sport, the NFL for example, while you have multiple teams,

the field and the rules are all the same. It's the champions who have great players, but also great execution and great leadership. They play as a team and they deliver the best team execution. Execution – to coin a phrase we use all the time at Active – means helping our clients achieve more. That's what makes Active a leader in our industry.

Will you discuss Active's long and deep commitment to diversity and inclusion and how this focus is a part of Active's culture?

Our culture is based on the principles of meritocracy and all our people having a voice: we listen to our people and consider all their diverse viewpoints. That's the key to collaborative problem solving, which is what we do for our clients. This diversity of thought, however, naturally extends to our view on talent. It's a fact that if we as marketers and traders are going to appeal to the millions of diverse consumers and the increasing number of diverse client

companies that market to them, we have to attract and inspire diverse talent that can meet the needs of these consumers and our business model in general.

In 2021, I have made it a personal mission to hold our leaders even more accountable than ever before on this important area of focus. We began with a focus of awareness for all our leaders. We commissioned and delivered an industry-specific, graduate-level course on DE&I and, as you know, all solutions have to start with awareness. Are we there yet? No, but we are always improving and, in addition to our focus on the present, we have embarked upon a strategy to build a future pipeline of diverse talent for our industry.

While diversity and inclusion is the right thing to do, you have also stated that it is critical for driving better business results. Will you elaborate on how diversity and inclusion impacts business performance?

While the moral argument is clear, the business case is too. Let's start with the marketplace – the population in the U.S. and Europe is increasingly diverse. Once we see that as a business reality, the rest is a simple "connect the dots" exercise. But we have to accept that business as we know it is based on the acceptance of capitalism in our societies. Even the heretofore purist communist regimes have adopted capital entrepreneurship as a means of supporting and appeasing their populations.

Capitalism works better than socialism. With capitalism, successful growth leads to prosperity or at least the opportunity for greater prosperity for all of the society's members. True there are

“Our culture is based on the principles of meritocracy and all our people having a voice: we listen to our people and consider all their diverse viewpoints. That's the key to collaborative problem solving, which is what we do for our clients.”

“Our team values focus on collaboration, coordination and cooperation.

**Our strength is in our ability to communicate with each other. We
create solutions and solve client challenges together.”**

always the “1 percenters” in a capitalist hierarchy who may not play by the rules. But, in general, this theory has been advanced by forward-thinking business leaders and consultants such as Peter Drucker since the 1960s. The entrepreneurial opportunities in a capitalistic market environment play well to the opportunities for diverse people.

Consumers in the societies where we do business are not only increasingly diverse, but their spending power has also increased over the years. Companies that produce products for them are tuning into the needs of these diverse demographics, with many of them being founded and led by diverse teams. There are companies that are moving into markets in different countries and cultures, again to appeal to a diverse demographic with spending power. In a society that depends on the success of capital enterprise, these companies and consumers are being addressed as a viable part of the economic infrastructure – an economic infrastructure that needs to grow and prosper so that all of its members prosper as well.

Prosperity helps meet the needs of people. All people have hopes, dreams and aspirations for themselves and their families. The theory of capitalism as the most effective form of socialism is not new. Each generation, regardless of race, gender, orientation, or ethnicity aspires to leave a better future for those who follow. Aside from basic needs of food, clothing and shelter, education, skills and other benefits of a prosperous society contribute to that better future.

That’s why all participants in the economic, demographic mix are critical to sustaining the

economy and society it serves. That’s why DE&I is good for business and, as Active serves these businesses, it’s good for Active. The bottom line when it comes to the intersection of DE&I talent and business is this: In order to better serve these businesses, Active needs diverse thinking and especially diverse cultural views on the markets and consumers. We know that this need is best filled by diverse professionals. The business mantra is therefore: “Include all!” Inclusion is good for business because it’s good for the economy and good for the societies that are served by the economy.

What are the keys to being effective in attracting and retaining diverse talent and how is Active making sure that it is reaching a diverse talent pool?

We cannot be passive. We need to go after a wide and deep talent pool and inspire them to want to learn about our industry, and in particular, about our company. That means having the right sort of recruiting message and knowing where to look. The challenge for our managers working with our in-house and external recruiters is to convey the right message: “What sets Active apart as an employer,” and deliver it to the right candidate audiences. This means seeking out Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBC’s) and other organizations that focus on media and marketing as part of their educational mission with minorities and where some of the HBC’s are lacking in the resources or curriculum, we can help them with that as well. We want to build a robust pipeline for ourselves and the industry in general.

How important are metrics to measure and track the impact of Active’s diversity efforts?

Very important and that’s the accountability I am measuring my leaders on. In turn, I expect them to hold their team and functional leaders accountable.

How is Active making sure that its diverse talent has opportunities to grow and lead within the company in order to retain this talent?

The pandemic changed a lot and the competition in our industry for the best talent has never been fiercer. That said, as I mentioned before, we have embarked upon a deliberate talent identification and retention program. It’s a four-step program to attract, competitively pay, retain and grow talent at all levels. This extends naturally to our diversity recruiting efforts. As I said earlier, we start by assigning recruiters to these tasks who are themselves people of color and Hispanic and thereby tune into the best places to proactively seek talent. It’s all about being able to make the case: “Why Active? What will you get from us as an employer?”

What do you tell young, diverse talent about the career opportunities that exist in the industry?

We tell them that we care about them and that we know our role as allies in their efforts to grow and develop in our industry. It’s our responsibility to them and I know all my leaders understand my expectation to approach it that way. Practically speaking, we want to be able to develop and create paths that include diverse experience in the various disciplines and job assignments, and offer continuous training and mentoring. ●

“The bottom line when it comes to the intersection of DE&I talent and business is this: In order to better serve these businesses, Active needs diverse thinking and especially diverse cultural views on the markets and consumers.”