



Alan S. Elkin

EDITORS' NOTE Alan Elkin is Chairman and CEO. He co-founded Active International in 1984. Alan began his career at Kaiser Broadcast, which, under his direction as Senior Vice President of Sales, later became Field Communications and then Katz Media Group. He's received the Entrepreneur Of The Year Award by Ernst & Young and the British American Business Inc. Award in recognition of Active's global accomplishments. Alan has also made community involvement a priority. Through the company's ActiveCares program, contributions have been made to over 600 charities since 1997.

COMPANY BRIEF Active International (activeinternational.com) is a financial solutions company that generates revenue and reduces costs for major brands. A technology-driven company, Active was founded more than 32 years ago, and focuses on employing best-in-class Adtech, Martech, and Data Analytics to serve its clients and its business. While media is Active's core competency, the company also provides a broad portfolio of products, including Retail Marketing, Travel and Hospitality, Contact Center Services, Freight and Logistics, and Lighting. Active International is based in New York and has offices in 16 countries.

What does Active International do and how does that benefit brands?

Active International is a financial solutions company that counts the Fortune 100 as our clients. We create value for our clients through our business model, which generates cost efficiencies in numerous ways.

For example, through the utilization of one of our models, clients are able to receive a premium to market value for their underperforming assets. In exchange, they agree to purchase goods and services through us. We offer a portfolio of services including travel and hospitality, retail marketing, freight and logistics, LED lighting and displays, and technology services and media, with media being the centerpiece and core competency of our product portfolio.

Delivering Expertise, Excellence, and Efficiencies

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

Our partnerships are with best-in-class vendors and service providers on a global basis. In fact, they are typically the vendors and service providers that our clients are currently using. In order for our clients to purchase the media that is part of their business strategy through us, we must have partnerships with the media outlets detailed in their plan.

As part of that consultative approach, we work closely with our clients to understand their business goals. This includes discussing their strategies and examining key drivers including short-term capital requirements, the financial, brand, or distribution challenges they are facing, and where the opportunities are to reduce costs for expenditures across their enterprise. The ability to customize a solution based on what is most meaningful to our clients is central to the success and sustainability of our business. Together, this enables us to leverage our expertise, create efficiencies, and focus on excellence in our deliverables.

As you look to the future, what are the priorities for Active International?

From a media perspective, it's clear that the industry is undergoing tectonic shifts, particularly as brands evolve from buying shows to buying audience in order to increase reach. Staying ahead of those shifts, providing a point-of-view to our clients, offering solutions to help them manage this disruption as well as target consumers and purchaser media more efficiently, is something we focus on every day, across the company.

Our primary focus is to deliver exceptional value to our clients and to help them be successful. We've made significant investments in technology on the infrastructure side, as well as in Adtech/Martech, as we believe data-driven solutions are of paramount importance to our clients.

To that end, we have developed a proprietary platform that includes predictive analytics capabilities and are laser focused on identifying and delivering the most cutting-edge solutions to clients. We have acquired technology companies to broaden our capabilities, including programmatic, an incubator facility for emerging technologies, and are involved in industry events that focus on discovering the best cross-channel device solutions and new tech companies to develop partnerships with.

We launched a data-driven consultancy, NeueVu, to help marketers better understand

■
Our primary focus is to deliver exceptional value to our clients.
■

How does Active determine the best solution for clients?

Our business model is flexible and adaptable, designed to meet the needs of our clients, which include media companies. We place a large portion of the media's media. Further, it is based on a consultative approach, and we've spent the past 32-plus years understanding what challenges brands and the media face within their category and of course more recently, the impact of technology, the rise of the consumer, the challenge of reaching those consumers in the world of cross-channel devices, and increased competition.

how to identify and connect with their audiences, as well as measure those engagements.

We are also focused on having best-in-class talent. We believe we do, and we make ongoing investments in training to ensure they have the resources and skills to meet marketplace demands.

That brings up an interesting point. Technology is certainly reshaping how organizations conduct business. In your opinion, what else is “disrupting” the status quo?

Speed, agility, and the need for expertise are real challenges facing business executives across every industry – especially when you consider that one-third of the top 20 companies across most industries will be disrupted over the next three years, largely because they are not moving fast enough. Executives must be nimble and more versatile, and conversant in digital in order to understand how to reach consumers. Despite this, many businesses continue to be hamstrung by legacy systems, processes, and protocols. Companies that are best able to leverage technology will be well-positioned to thrive in a changing business environment.

Uber and AirBnB are great examples. In 2008, each company sought to redefine the travel experience, in terms of transportation and lodging. They were both initially discredited as unsustainable business models but, by using technology in advantageous ways to meet consumer demands, they were able to deliver what customers wanted, when they wanted it. Through cutting waste and operating more efficiently, Uber and AirBnB carved out competitive advantages in well-established industries. They now operate in more than 480 and 34,000 cities worldwide, respectively. Their success is unparalleled.

In a similar vein, globalization continues to disrupt the status quo. Historically, globalization was driven almost exclusively by the world’s governments, large multinational corporations, and major financial institutions.

When leveraged effectively, technology and digital platforms also provide new ways to market to customers directly, no matter where they are.

Executives must be nimble and more versatile, and conversant in digital in order to understand how to reach consumers.

Now, as a result of technology and emerging digital platforms, that’s no longer the case. Instead, large corporations, entrepreneurs, freelancers, and small businesses are all able to participate in the global marketplace.

With more global players, however, technology has driven increased competition for sector, product, and service dominance. When leveraged effectively, technology and digital platforms also provide new ways to market to customers directly, no matter where they are. It’s a constant give-and-take relationship businesses must navigate.

What does this mean in terms of brand advertising and marketing?

Technology has caused significant fragmentation in the media marketplace. The proliferation of digital, mobile, and social channels continues to change how consumers engage with brands.

As a result, the variety of technology-driven channels and touchpoints is having a real impact on how advertisers purchase media. Rather than prioritizing investments tied to individual shows or platforms, advertisers are instead pursuing audiences on a more holistic basis. In other words, they are diversifying their efforts to meet target consumers no matter where they are, rather than focusing on one specific outlet.

This shift in strategy, in turn, is setting off a wave of change throughout the rest of the industry, including the way ads are priced and sold. A recent survey we conducted, for example, found that almost two-thirds of media executives anticipate the current Upfronts and Newfronts sales model will be replaced within three years.

It’s also having an impact on how advertisers evaluate performance and ROI. Tracking key metrics across multiple devices, including conversion and attribution, is a challenge many advertisers are still working through. As a result, expect to see a rush of innovation surrounding cross-device program evaluation over the next 12 to 18 months.

How do companies navigate through this transition?

A company is only as strong as the people who build it. To prosper in today’s business landscape, we need talent with not only the right skill set, but also the right mindset. A business culture that values curiosity and passion from all employees – from the leadership team to administrative personnel – is essential.

Businesses should actively look to disrupt their own status quo. This means working with companies that continuously deliver efficiency and value and that are thinking about what’s next. Disruption may be unsettling to some, but there are also tremendous opportunities for those companies that can see it. It’s quite an exciting time to be in business. As a service business and an agency, we believe we are well-positioned to navigate through the disruption and continue to deliver exceptional value to our clients. ●