

# Bringing the Best of All of IPG

An Interview with Michael I. Roth,  
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Interpublic Group

**EDITORS' NOTE** In July 2004, Michael Roth was appointed Chairman of IPG, and he became CEO in January 2005. He had been a member of Interpublic's Board since 2002. Earlier, Roth was Chairman and CEO of the financial services holding company, The MONY Group. He serves on the boards of Pitney Bowes, Ryman Hospitality Properties, the Committee Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy, the Baruch College Fund, and the Partnership for New York City. Roth is a C.P.A. and the recipient of an LL.M. degree from New York University Law School and a J.D. from Boston University School of Law.



Michael I. Roth

**COMPANY BRIEF** Headquartered in New York, Interpublic Group ([interpublic.com](http://interpublic.com)) is one of the world's largest advertising and marketing companies. From global communications networks like McCann and FCB to domestic advertising agencies like Hill Holliday, The Martin Agency, as well as Deutsch, to global specialists like the events marketer Jack Morton, sports marketer Octagon, and public relations expert Weber Shandwick, Interpublic agencies span the globe, employing 50,000 people in more than 100 countries, working with clients such as L'Oréal, Unilever, General Motors, and MasterCard.

## How has IPG's role evolved to adjust to today's marketplace?

The market has changed dramatically as technology and consumer behavior continue to develop, and if we're not creating communications that are relevant to how consumers engage with media, then we're not relevant to our clients.

We focus on being client-centric, honing in on what our clients need, and what is relevant to them to drive business results.

Our core competency to deliver market-moving creative ideas is more relevant than it has ever been, but we have to put it together with other aspects of our business, be it media, experiential, or business transformation, which has become a part of our business process and what we offer to clients.

**Will that be the differentiator when it comes to nontraditional companies getting into the business?**

With regard to other entrants into our business, we continue to offer what they cannot – an integrated offering that brings the best of IPG to our clients in a holistic, integrated, and channel-agnostic way. We have to be agnostic in terms of where clients spend their money on the media side, so we don't have an economic interest in the outcome. We also have to be agnostic in terms of platforms and how we respond to the consumer.

We have the ability to bring the best of all of IPG to the table. That's

why we are in a very strong position to compete in this environment. When we overlay our creativity with our expertise, it's hard to compete with our people. Top talent comes here because we work with the best brands in the world.

## Are the traditional companies the sweet spot for IPG, and how important is it to work with early stage companies?

Ours is a talent-driven business, and having top talent like Rob Reilly at McCann, Susan Credle at FCB, and Jose-Miguel Sokoloff at MullenLowe is why clients want to work with us. These are the most creative thinkers in marketing, and they uncover answers to the seemingly impossible. While the agencies where they work are marquee brands, they work directly with early stage companies. Our accelerator programs nurture new tech companies and other start-ups. We bring in our business transformation expertise plus our marketing and distribution capabilities, and help these companies grow and win in the marketplace. We can also introduce them to our more traditional clients who are looking for innovation. Everyone wins.

## How difficult is it to protect a brand today?

Safeguarding communications with the consumer is vital to our success. That means investing in high-quality media that shares values with our clients' brands, which is a challenge as digital media continues to multiply.

We have to be well-versed in all opportunities for our clients to reach the consumer. If it means doing so online, we can do so safely, and we have strong relationships with our media partners to encourage them to create safe environments for our clients' messages.

It's the creative idea that is going to be relevant to consumers. The exposure might be only a few seconds, so consider the expertise that's

necessary to come up with an idea that addresses the consumer at the exact right moment, in the right media environment. We have that expertise.

On top of that, we see that it's effectively distributed online, and analyze the insights that go with that. We help clients pinpoint consumers, how to reach them, and the most effective messaging. We also evaluate the relevant touch points, what consumers are thinking about, and what their buying habits and search capabilities are.

## Is it more difficult to track traditional media with metrics?

The hardest metric dilemma today is TV. One of the reasons TV is challenged is that it's still hard to measure compared to how effectively we can measure digital reach.

That said, TV is still a very important tool for us, so we have to be able to provide an allocation of it for our clients. We manage the mix of the media spend on TV compared with Internet, experiential, radio, print, etc.

## Do you anticipate that certain traditional formats will go away?

More traditional formats need to hone in on what their value proposition is. If I'm in print, I want to know which consumers are still using print and what they are looking for – often it's more B-to-B, or specialty print. This is all about reach. If a company has a product that reaches the consumer we're looking for, that is the vehicle we will work with for our clients.

## Is there any separation between advertising and public relations today?

In our business, what used to be a digital agency is no longer just digital – they may have digital as part of their DNA, but they also do so much more, like creative and PR, because the bundled offering is what clients are looking for. All of our agencies can tap into all the resources we have within IPG. That's what's required in today's marketplace.

## What is the role of IPG as a holding company as it relates to having an umbrella culture?

As a holding company, we've fostered an entrepreneurial environment where our agencies are culture-driven from within. We don't have a single IPG culture, although promotion of diversity and inclusion is widespread across our cultures, as is a commitment to giving back to our communities.

Our role is to make sure that all of our people have the resources they need, and that all of IPG stands for ethical business practices, high standards, and financial strength. ●