

Harmelin adapting to new media

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by [Peter Key](#)

Staff Writer

BALA CYNWYD -- Harmelin Media has long been the largest media-buying firm in Pennsylvania.

Now, the Montgomery County firm is trying to prove it can be nimble in coming up with new strategies to capture a generation glued to new media.

"We have clients who say, 'So-and-so just advertised on an egg. Why can't we do that?'" said Mary Meder, president of the agency. "Advertising on an egg doesn't work for every client, though."

Harmelin Media, which negotiates and buys advertising space on behalf of ad agencies or directly for advertisers, has been making twin transitions in recent years. At the same time it is adapting to clients' need for new media strategies, the management team at Harmelin has been undergoing a transition of its own.

Meder and Executive Vice President Lyn Strickler, who are both veterans of two decades at Harmelin, are taking over more and more of the leadership, as founder and CEO Joanne Harmelin steps back. While Harmelin is not yet passing the baton, the next tier of management is in place for the eventual transition.

Harmelin, who founded Harmelin Media in 1983, built an agency that has 100 employees and places \$300 million in advertising every year on TV and radio, on outdoor advertising and in print, interactive and guerilla advertising efforts. It is one of the 10 largest independent media shops in the country.

Clients include Quality Plus Ford Dealers, Aetna, Universal Health Services, Herr's, Fox Philadelphia, UGI Corp., the state of Pennsylvania, Boscov's, Sheetz and Tasty Baking Co.

Increasingly, the firm is focusing on interactive and guerilla efforts -- including, occasionally, advertising on eggs. After all, while TV spots might cost \$2 million, a guerilla campaign can cost in the thousands.

Meder said the standard procedure with clients is to go through a case analysis focusing on four factors, ensuring that the work is creative, affordable, strategic and "executable," Meder said.

"Strategy is the driving force," said Meder, adding that traditional advertising may be a better fit for certain clients. "'Cool' is not right if it's not right for your brand."

The firm offers a book of sample work -- things clients have done before. It's known as the "lifestyle guerilla marketing book," and is often a blueprint for clients who are going into new territory.

For instance, for the Ford dealers seeking younger buyers, Harmelin has recommended more niche marketing.

"They want to get people to think about them differently," Strickler said.



Curt Hudson

Lyn Strickler (left), executive vice president of Harmelin Media, and Mary Meder, president, will put a client's message on an egg — or not.

Still, Meder and Strickler are focused on what the firm's clients need -- whether it's traditional advertising or advertising on cell phones.

Sometimes the ideas may even come before their time.

Case in point: Strickler cites an idea the firm had for an anti-drunken-driving campaign. They thought, if you really wanted to target young drinkers, especially young men, you need to get to them where they're drinking -- or, in this case, going to the bathroom.

So they found a company that made a motion-activated talking urinal and got it to make a prototype, with a voice urging restraint while drinking. Ultimately, the client decided that wasn't the best way to get the message out, and the talking urinal was never used.

But the idea was obviously ready for prime time: Last month, New Mexico's Department of Transportation introduced a talking urinal to dissuade drivers from drinking and driving.

"Hey, big guy," a voice says. "Having a few drinks? Then listen up!"

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