

Honoring Big Ideas

DMA Hall of Fame inducts 100th and 101st members: Ernan Roman and Michael Bronner

On Oct. 4, at a celebratory luncheon during the DMA2011 Conference & Exhibition in Boston, Ernan Roman and Michael Bronner will join direct marketing legends Richard Benson, Robert D. Rodale, Robert Stone, Lillian Vernon and others in the Direct Marketing Association's Hall of Fame.

This fall marks the 34th year of the awards, and Roman's and Bronner's inductions grow the ranks of the honorees past 100. Roman is the founder and principal of direct marketing services firm Ernan Roman Direct Marketing, and Bronner is the founder and chairman emeritus of direct marketing agency Digitas and the college-funding program Upromise.

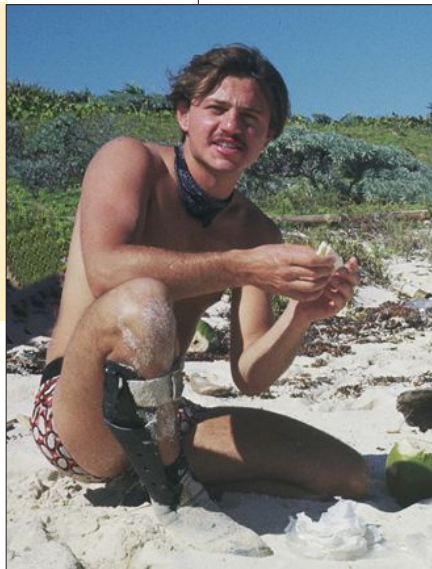
Both these men are "big idea" guys, which has led them to make significant contributions to the practice of direct marketing.

Ernan Roman

From a young adulthood spent diving for treasure in the Yucatan, Ernan Roman entered the world of direct marketing in the 1970s when it was still full of untested waters. The sense of excitement in being able to have an impact and make a contribution to the field was about the "only thing that could have gotten me to leave the coast of Mexico back then," says Roman.

After 10 years in the agency world learning the business, Roman went out on his own in 1983 and started his marketing consultancy, Ernan Roman Direct Marketing. Plumbing the depths of companies' marketing programs, he soon discovered his

Ernan Roman, now founder and principle of Ernan Roman Direct Marketing, during his early career diving for sunken treasure.



first big find: unacceptably low response rates and high levels of budget waste. In response, he developed an integrated direct marketing approach that leveraged sequencing and a multichannel mix. Building off this revelation, his future work led to the formation of two methodologies that also are critical to success in direct marketing today: opt-in marketing and the Voice of Customer Relationship Research Process.

Roman gives a nod to several industry luminaries, early explorers of this field themselves, who helped him learn what it means to sell directly to customers. "My father, Murray Roman, is acknowledged as the pioneer of the telemarketing industry, and it was he and my mother Eva who introduced me to the world of high-value, person-to-person interactions."

The "father of fulfillment," Stan Fenvesy, taught Roman how to integrate the front end and back end of direct marketing in order to fulfill orders in the most efficient way that satisfies customers. And, he says, Lee Epstein, founder of the lettershop MAILMEN Inc., "reinforced the importance of ethics and doing right while also being successful."

Looking ahead, Roman continues to search for

new insights regarding marketing in the hope that his discoveries will help to continually elevate the quality, relevance and effectiveness of the practice.

Currently, he is excited about a major new trend that he thinks companies should factor into their marketing. He calls it the "reciprocity of value equation."

"Thanks to the internet, most consumers are exceptionally knowledgeable shoppers and inclined to do their own research and price/value comparisons.→

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—Michael Bronner

As a result, they have developed very specific preferences regarding the messages, offers and media that are most appropriate for them, as individuals. In spite of privacy concerns, they understand that if they expect a marketer to provide highly targeted information and value, then they, as consumers, must provide detailed preference information which will enable the marketer to deliver a personalized and relevant customer experience.



“This willingness to opt in and self-profile preferences in exchange for self-defined relevant information is one of the most transformational breakthroughs for marketers. The ability for the consumer to request very targeted information, and enable the marketer to succeed because of the preference data they have provided, will significantly reduce the age-long adversarial relationship between buyer and seller,” he explains.

Michael Bronner

Like many direct marketing greats, Michael Bronner didn't know when he started a fledgling coupon book business—during his college years in the early 1980s—that he was getting into the field of direct marketing. To him, it was just a good idea that no one had executed yet.

Thirty years later, his simple idea (as he calls it) has burgeoned into the global, award-winning agency Digitas and its subsidiaries, Publicis Modem and Digitas Health. It also was the genesis of the American Express Membership Rewards program, whose evolution helped Bronner conceive Upromise. Today, Bronner is just as much a believer in big ideas as ever. “Success is idea-driven,” he says, pointing out that all the research in the world won't help you if you can't translate it into an idea that resonates with your audience.

But just because he's a creative soul doesn't mean Bronner steers away from the more accountable side of direct marketing. In fact, being able to measure the success of his work was what drew him to direct marketing practices in the first place, regardless of the name for the discipline he was helping to shape. Having never interned or apprenticed with any business, he entered the field with no preconceived notions—just the “goal to develop ideas

around the premise of giving someone something that gets them to take action in a profitable way.”

With a non-traditional start to his career, it's not surprising that Bronner's mentors break the mold. Instead of learning his craft at the knee of a few stars, he credits the employees of the companies he's built with providing inspiration and illumination on a day-to-day basis. In turn, he says Digitas (famously known as Bronner Slosberg Humphrey in the 1990s) grew into an agency of thousands of talented people—and fellow educators—by pioneering the use of a multichannel approach to manage the behaviors of consumers to build brands.

And now, he adds, direct marketing must evolve to leverage multichannel efforts to help customers find you, feel engaged with your value proposition and connect with your brand enough to take action. “It's a huge shift from where it was when I started out,” Bronner emphasizes, when direct marketing meant targeting your audience and looking for the right pressure point that motivated them to buy.

But Bronner cautions marketers not to get so caught up in the recent changes to the marketing environment that they forget the underlying goal has remained the same. “You still need the right value proposition, the right way to engage around that value proposition and to help customers become advocates,” he says. While the tools of direct marketing can help you drive to innovation and insight, you need big ideas to attract, engage and motivate your audience.



With this in mind, he encourages young marketers to be “present in the moment,” instead of always calculating the end game. An interesting person can tell a real story, not simply push a résumé. “Employers are looking for people who have taken risks,” Bronner says, “even if they failed along the way. Companies today are so different than they were a decade ago—needing more creativity, more innovation, more originality.”

Three decades later, Bronner hasn't lost his entrepreneurial spirit, and he urges all direct marketers to tap into their inner entrepreneurs to achieve success in this new era of direct marketing.

—Hallie Mummert