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## PROFILE: Rubenstein rises to new heights with bold approach

Craig McGuire - 2 Feb 2004 00:00

**A far cry from her days as a trainee at Bloomingdale's, Marke Rubenstein's no-nonsense style has led her to the lead PR role at Deutsch - a position she never truly expected.**

Despite a successful track record that has enabled her to lead a string of high-profile clients from agency to agency, Marke Rubenstein never envisioned a career in marketing and publicity. Today, she serves as EVP, director of promotions and PR at Deutsch, a New York-based ad agency that was bought by the Interpublic Group in 2000 and currently touts Tommy Hilfiger, Bank One, and Mitsubishi among its clients. Rubenstein was recruited in January 1999 to launch Deutsch's PR and promotional marketing business. Under her watch, the company has inked a slew of blue-chip firms for PR and product marketing services, including DirectTV, Cadbury Schweppes, Snapple, Mott's, and T.G.I. Friday's. It's all a far cry from where Rubenstein pictured her career trajectory in the mid-1970s, when she started out as a gadget buyer in an executive training program at Bloomingdale's. Dissatisfied with the position, she stayed home to raise her two children before heading back to school to pursue a master's in communications at Fairfield

University. Nearing graduation, though, fate stepped in as Rubenstein decided to fulfill her remaining credits by participating in a business-ethics research project with Father John Schmotzer, a Jesuit priest and professor at Fairfield. "I'd never taken a real marketing course and I had no intention of heading in that direction, but co-publishing a paper seemed like a good idea at the time," Rubenstein reflects. "And then, just like that, the dear man died of a heart attack, leaving me short on credits." Scrambling to make some up, Rubenstein accepted an internship at Dorf & Stanton, a boutique agency that was eventually bought by Shandwick. "I was the best intern," says the usually modest Rubenstein. "I was by far the oldest intern and already had professional experience, but still, I was the best." What followed was a rapid elevation to media director. After a year, Rubenstein jumped to North Castle Partners and then to The Marketing Continuum, where she was responsible for planning and executing PR and promotional programs for clients such as PNC Bank, Naya Water, Richardson-Vicks, Sprint, Labatt, and Guinness. No matter the client, Rubenstein's unassuming style and staunch work ethic has enabled her to build lasting relationships that have extended beyond her agency stints. "Take Michael Sands, for example, an industry professional I've worked with for the last decade," Rubenstein says. "He hired me when he was the brand manager at Rolling Rock, and was there when I got the Snapple account. When he landed at Ben & Jerry's, I convinced him to hire Deutsch. And now he's back at Snapple, which is now also a Deutsch client." When Steven Jarmon, VP, partner marketing and community ventures at Snapple, met Rubenstein for a photo op, the first thing she did was insist he take his shirt off. "He showed up in this horrific checkered shirt that still makes me shudder to this day," Rubenstein recalls. "I didn't even know him, and that was the first

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thing out of my mouth." Her no-nonsense approach, though, made an impression on Jarmon, and he has worked with her through three agencies. "Marke gets our business because she's embedded herself so deeply that when she walks down the halls at Snapple, she's often mistaken for an employee," explains Jarmon. "We [also] love her because she is so crazy, but not without being grounded. When we were planning a summer mobile tour, she turned what was an ordinary event into the Dye Hard Snapple Tour, where our trucks traveled around dying people's hair the color of our products." Leaving in their wake scores of mall shoppers, business owners, community leaders, and even local weathermen with hair dyed the color of Peach Snapple, the PR stunt netted ample broadcast and print coverage in every market they entered. Submerging herself in her client's culture is only one arrow in Rubenstein's quiver, however. "Being smart just isn't enough in New York," she says. "Clients want to work with people they like, so you need a sense of humor, and that must be demonstrated in your work." Early last year, when Samuel Adams beer challenged Rubenstein to come up with a concept to reinforce the brand's quality, she helped orchestrate an integrated campaign for Samuel Adams Chocolate Bock by encouraging brew master Jim Koch to concoct a blend that includes Scharffen Berger chocolate using cocoa beans from Ghana. Appropriately, the brew will debut around Valentine's Day. And when Rubenstein's team was asked to come up with a promotion for Rose's Cocktail Infusions - a line of premium mixers for sophisticated drinks such as apple martinis and cosmopolitans - they delivered a risqué ad depicting a beautiful woman reclining and a blurred image of a man in the background mixing drinks. The catchphrase: "Bring the bartender home tonight." "It was a pretty big gamble, this strong, sexually charged promotion, because remember, we're the applesauce folks," says Tony Jacobs, director of marketing at Mott's, which owns Rose's. "But here we weren't selling applesauce to families. We were selling a sophisticated product to the *Sex and the City* set, and this ad hit the target." Rubenstein is quick to credit her team, and Jarmon, Jacobs, and other supporters attest to her ability to surround herself with talent. "I don't want people who just come to me with problems," she says. "I want them to propose solutions, no matter how far out they are." Kristen Balderston was one of Rubenstein's first hires five years ago. When she started, there were only three staffers in the department, and the few essentially did the jobs of many. Under the tutelage of Rubenstein, Balderston has risen to account director, heading up many of Deutsch's key PR clients. "Marke has taught me that at times it's as important to manage down as it is to manage up," Balderston says. "PR is a fast-paced business, and she's shown me how to trust my gut and make quick, smart decisions. She's taught me to run my accounts with an honest and open approach, and I've learned how much clients appreciate this, particularly in a time when transparency is so critical." -----  
 Marke Rubenstein **1999-present** EVP, PR/promotions, Deutsch **1998** SVP, PR/promotions, The Marketing Continuum **1994-1997** SVP of PR, North Castle Partners Advertising **1989-1993** Shandwick (AAE to media director) **1988** Intern at PR firm Dorf & Stanton as part of master's program **1987-1988** Master's degree in communications from Fairfield University

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