



# INTERVIEW

## INNOVATION AND ROI: THE FINAL FRONTIERS IN MARKETING?

DAN CIRSTEA, MANAGING PARTNER, *United Media*

### **1. United is one of the most important boutique type agencies currently on the market. Can you describe the company in a few words?**

United was set up in 2000 with the mission to democratize the marketing and PR communications, and thus to give the opportunity for medium sized organizations, or brands, or projects to have the same high value marketing and PR communications as the big ones. United further become probably one of the leading Romanian marcomm companies. Our core services are: consultancy, PR, branding, advertising, creative services, B2B & B2C event organizing, media planning & buying. Our experience encompasses over 3,500 communication projects for corporate, government and non-profit organizations, both in Romania and abroad.

### **2. What are the trends in the marketing & PR industry in 2018? What are your expectations for 2019?**

Currently, almost every marketing campaign has a digital component attached to it. One of its many

advantages is the quick feedback that you can get online, particularly in social media. Online advertising grows everywhere in the world, but what is more important is that online audiences grow, while TV audiences tend to decrease. And this is a trend, especially among young people. Digital is no longer just a media channel, it becomes a mandatory element in strategic communication mix. But there is also something else: the balance of the strategic communication mix changes. In the last years, advertising has decreased in importance, and PR has increased, especially the online PR, and they no longer function as pure and distinct elements, but work together as an ensemble.

### **3. What are United's biggest successes so far, with a focus on the recent period?**

During the past three years, United has developed and strongly consolidated the PR services. We have created new KPI's and we have strengthened our PR and Strategy teams. Based on those indicators, United can build precise marketing predictions, and thus we can sometimes guarantee our clients the success of their PR or

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marketing activities. This is the result of more than 8 years of application. Using this system we managed to bring many of our clients in the top of their industries in terms of media visibility. I am talking about organizations like: CTP, Christian Tour, The Egyptian Tourism Authority, Maritimo Shopping Center (Immofinanz), Konica, JW Marriott, P3 Parks, Portland Trust, or Knorr (Unilever).

On the B2B market, I will mention the example of CTP, the biggest industrial real-estate developer and owner of industrial and logistics parks in Romania and CEE. What we observed was a huge gap between its Market Share and its press Share of Voice (the percentage of the total media coverage of the industry accounted for by a brand). In this particular case, United's main objective was to bring CTP in top 3 of its industry Visibility in Year 1, and to establish it as the absolute Market Leader and Expert in front of the Romanian press in Year 3, while building a positive image of the company as a leading international player. After only 3 months of co-operation, CTP become Visibility Leader with a Share of Voice of more than 46%, by means of a complex PR system implemented by United.

In the B2C segment, we also had excellent results for example with Christian Tour, one of the biggest Romanian tour-operator and tourism agency. Christian Tour is mainly active on the consumer market, and before our cooperation it had a Market Share of about 34%, while only 17% in terms of media Share of Voice. Our main target was to bring Christian Tour on the Second Position in the top of its industry visibility in the first year of cooperation, while building a positive image of the company as a leading Romanian tour-operator. After only 11 months of co-operation, we doubled their Share of Voice to 33%, and Christian Tour become Visibility Leader in the tourism industry!

In 2018, we have continued to develop our own PR tools and we added new major names to our portfolio of clients, both local and multinational companies from various industries such as real estate consultancy, retail, and financial services.

Our vision is that PR and marketing communications need to be predictable and produce ROI, and in order to accomplish that, they need to be both creative, and measurable.

#### **4. Will you please nominate the top three challenges both for the media & advertising industry and for you, as a CEO, in leading transformation?**

I think the top three challenges are the digitalization, the cyclical economic environment and the further adjustment of our industry and own company to it. For us, as a company, and naturally for me as its CEO, the biggest challenge was to adapt in order to surpass the two economic crisis. And then to readjust to a more favorable, yet demanding economic environment. We founded the company in the last years of an economic crisis which ended somewhere in 2003 or 2004. Leading the agency through these two periods was for sure a big challenge. We had to adapt to a new climate, and to all the changes that impacted our clients and their fields of activity and also the Romanian mass-media.

#### **5. What's your view about the scarcity of workforce in Romania? How do you fill the gap?**

When everybody has the same problem that is not a problem anymore, it is a fact and a reality that you need to embrace! The people willingness to evolve, to learn and to find new ways of doing their jobs better is the real challenge. We have many extraordinary senior professionals, and a lot of talented young people that recently entered in the industry. Also, I think that is very important to develop your team step by step, and to keep your employees within the company as long as possible by offering them a creative environment and encourage them to develop constantly. It may sound a little bit too sentimental, but our philosophy through all these almost 20 years of activity was to create strong connections between co-workers so we are much more of a family than a group of people working temporarily at the same company, as it happens in many cases. Being

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productive and knowing how to differentiate among other agencies is also an important factor, because we are running a business and we have to ensure financial security for our employees.

United differentiates through our ROI System, and the development of special competences on certain industries (e.g. real estate, shopping centers, retail, tourism, FMCG, financial services and B2B). Developing in depth competences means besides learning, also developing tools and other resources for it, such as: Mallketing®, 3D Brandsense®, visibility studies, various research on the retail market, industry events (we organized such events like Romans. The Romanian Manufacturing Summit and the Logistics Conference), partnerships with major industry events.

**6. In this environment, where do you find talent and innovation?**

In the company! We start from within, always. When we have a challenging project, we search within the company both the talent we need, and the innovation. And only then we search for outside sources: from hiring new people, to consultants or freelancers.

**7. What does the Industrial Revolution 4.0 mean for you? How does digitalization, Internet of Things and Artificial intelligence or Virtual Reality affects the way you do business?**

Synthetically, I would say that since change is constant, our adaptation to change must also be constant. Hence the innovation. The digitalization and all the other trends are all major trends that affect not only our industry, but our clients' as well. The digitalization for example created new marketing instruments, and even platforms help us to better target our audiences, and help or clients to develop their business. So we need to embrace them, and to constantly innovate.

**8. You are an acknowledged leader in the real estate marketing. What are the trends in this industry sector?**

The real estate sector is developing at a fast pace, even though not as accelerated as in the boom

years. Marketing wise, the real-estate sector matured, so that we see office projects and industrial projects and developers using the more sophisticated marketing strategies and tools that we once saw only in the marketing for shopping centers or residential projects. Digital marketing is one of the tools, but not the only one: Public and Media Relations are having a higher share in the marketing mix.

**9. How do you prepare yourself to become better, as a leader? How do you get out of your comfort zone? How do you find the right work-life balance?**

Strategy and talking. I study more on strategy and together with my colleagues at United we pay more attention to strategic planning. And I talk more with other CEO's on business strategy issues. Regarding the work-life balance, that is a continuous project and challenge. What does work for me was to clarify my role in the company and empower my colleagues to have more responsibility and to take decisions. And that allowed me to have more time for my family and my children.

**10. In the Romanian economy, fundamentals still look OK. In this situation, what tends to bring marketing industry up or down?**

I think the biggest concern should be the level of innovation both in terms of product development, as well as marketing communications. Innovation is indeed needed because of the fast pace of change within the society and economy. The problem seems to be that it is too much imitation, and quite a low appetite for new ideas on both sides of the coin. So, in order to increase the innovation, I believe that new methodologies need to be used, that marketing people need to be involved early in the product development phase, and more focus to be given to customer needs instead of competition.

**11. What's your "Be careful at..." advice for 2019?**

True value that businesses deliver to their clients. Both in the B2B, and B2C industries.