

# PLEDS Agency On the Move!

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## Talking with Heather Coleman, Manager, Journal Advertising and Special Media

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**Can you give us a brief history of your background in the consumer and agency health-care field, up to and including your current position as Manager, Journal Advertising and Special Media.**

I graduated from Concordia University's communication studies program in 1982, specializing in television production. My goal at the time was to find a job in public relations. During my studies, I had worked as a freelancer in the public relations department at Teleglobe Canada, producing their in-house employee television program, Videomag. However, the jobs to be had at the time were in advertising.

As luck would have it, my first boss, Lynda Ditchburn, Media Director of Kitching Advertising, was an alumnus of the communications program. She was initially reluctant to hire me; she felt my background was creative and thought I would be unhappy working in the media. Landing that job was what I consider my first sales pitch; I have worked in media ever since. The best media campaigns have strong creative thinking behind them and incorporate some element of the unexpected.

My first job was as a Media Secretary at Kitching Advertising. Within three months, I was promoted to Media Buyer and eventually, Media Supervisor. At Kitching, I worked on accounts such as *The Montreal Gazette*, Voyageur Bus, Canada Steamship

Lines, and Flygt Canada. I also had a glimpse into the world of pharmaceuticals while working on the Frank W. Horner Ltd. account.

I was lured away from Kitching Advertising in 1988 by the fabulous husband and wife team of

Elliott Ettenberg and Debra Sharp. I went to work with them at Communications Prisme, and soon became Associate Media Director. It was at Prisme that I really learned about advertising. Elliott is truly a brilliant marketer, a visionary, and I do regret not having worked longer with both him and Debra. The cornerstone of Prisme was its use of psychographics, which I found fascinating. Psychographics were applied to media, and they dictated how and what we planned and purchased. With psychographics, I could rationalize media choices beyond the numbers. Prisme had great accounts, and I was privy to

work on Cadillac Fairview, The Fashion Centres, Place Montreal Trust, Corby Distilleries, Coty Cosmetics, and Daisyfresh Bras, to name a few.

I spent two years at Prisme before going to the client side at Merck Frosst Canada Ltd., joining PLEDS as Manager, Advertising and Special Media, in 1991. Since its inception in 1987, there have only been five individuals to work full-time at PLEDS. I am the second manager, successor to Debra Halliday Coates. Jill Commerford has worked at PLEDS almost from its inception and is a Media



Heather Coleman, Manager, Special Advertising and Special Media, PLEDS.



From left to right: Claude Mayer, Media Buyer/Planner; Heather Coleman, Manager, Journal Advertising and Special Media; and Jill Commerford, Media Buyer/Planner.

Buyer/Planner, and Claude Mayer was hired in 1995, also as a Media Buyer/Planner. The three of us know we are privileged. We've discussed the fact that we feel we have the best jobs at Merck Frosst.

### **What led to the creation of the PLEDS Agency by Merck Frosst.**

As with all creations, PLEDS was the vision of one of the Company's luminaries, Brian McLeod (former Vice-President, Marketing). Brian wanted to bring media placement in-house. The marketing communications department was in its infancy. The idea was to form a department that would operate like an agency and would have, within its structure, a fully incorporated media placement service. I believe this is one example of how Merck Frosst marches to the beat of a different drum.

### **Where does the name PLEDS come from?**

I'm often asked if PLEDS is an acronym. While we have our own version of what it stands for, the truth is anything but glamorous. PLEDS is actually the brand name of a product (an antiseptic swab) that Merck & Co. manufactured.

### **How has Merck Frosst benefited by the establishment of an in-house agency? What differentiates PLEDS Agency from other pharmaceutical advertising agencies?**

Merck Frosst has benefited from an in-house agency by capitalizing on the agency status, resulting in significant cost efficiencies for the company. PLEDS is unique in the Canadian pharmaceutical industry, but what truly differentiates us is the ability to function as an agency, while also being Merck Frosst employees. There is great satisfaction from truly feeling like part of the marketing team. We have access to complete marketing information and we share the same loyalties/goals as our colleagues. We know

all the players well and work closely with them on a day-to-day basis.

At some point, I think we all question our career choices and whether there is any societal value in what we do. It is very unfortunate that there is a negative perception of the pharmaceutical industry. Yes, I work in marketing. Yes, I work in advertising. What is the big differentiation? I'm proud of the products we place ads for, and I'm proud of the products that were discovered on site. There's tremendous good being done by Merck Frosst, and all R<sub>x</sub>&D companies. I'm proud to be a part of the bigger picture, especially when I think of the benefits for the end user, the patient.

### **Besides medical journal advertising, what other type of media is PLEDS assessing and buying?**

PLEDS is also responsible for recommending and purchasing "special media vehicles". This category is quite broad, including anything from off-the-shelf products to all types of custom communications vehicles.

As you know, consumer advertising of drugs is prohibited in Canada, but disease awareness campaigns are permitted. For several years, we participated in a highly interesting information campaign on hair loss, which was a great deal of fun. We bought advertising

space ranging from Olympic packages, network television, radio, magazines, and daily newspaper spots, to outdoor billboards and interior backlights in clinics.

## What role does PLEDs play in the development of product and corporate communications plans?

PLEDS is part of the extended brand team. As tacticians, we are very busy during communication planning. Working closely with the promotion and product managers, we are responsible for developing journal advertising strategies and for recommending special media vehicles.

PLEDS also works closely with public affairs. We assist the managers with various analyses, and procurement initiatives, we obtain various media proposals, and we purchase media on their behalf.

## What changes, if any, do you anticipate over the next two to five years, with respect to the way Merck Frosst communicates with physicians?

As I said earlier, Merck Frosst marches to a different drum. In this highly competitive business, being first is very important—whether it is first to market with a new product, or in some other way. We aren't just anticipating changes, we will be driving big changes in our communications with physicians.

Just watch... Merck Frosst is on the move! **CPM**



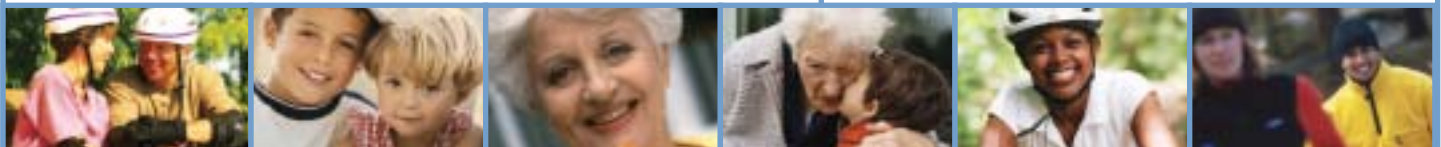
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