

bMod Communications

A candid conversation with Eric Frendo, President and Co-Founder of bMod Communications



Murray Forrestall, Kathryn Buck, Eric Frendo.

Without spouting all sorts of lofty theories and hypotheses, we focus on what it takes to change the behaviour of our target audience.

bMod Communications seems to have come out of nowhere and has achieved a significant presence in a very short time. Tell us about your background and how exactly the agency came about?

I started my career in the healthcare field as a Sales Representative for Merck Frosst in Toronto. I was later transferred to the head office in Montreal and worked in several marketing positions. Finally, in

1997, I made the leap, becoming a Partner in an Internet healthcare company. It was my first entrepreneurial experience and I loved it. It lasted four great years before the dot com bubble burst. Shortly after, I became Managing Director of DKY Pharma. Finally, in 2003, my wife and I started bMod Communications. It was a natural progression.

It may seem like a natural progression to you, but starting one's own agency is a rather big step. What was your motivation, beyond the desire to be an entrepreneur?

Kathryn and I had always talked about starting a business together. We weren't quite sure what type of business it was going to be. This goes back a ways, of course—Kathryn was in law school and I was a Pharmaceutical Representative at the time. Our goals began to crystallize after we moved to Montreal. It was then that Kathryn joined the pharmaceutical industry, leading the pharmaceutical division at Canada Direct Marketing. Later, she became Director of Client Services at Anderson. The way we saw it, the next logical step was for her to join me in a new venture.



Members of the Toronto Client Service Team.

Did you have any outside support—that is, a global agency connection?

No. We have been a private company from the outset, without affiliations to global agencies...not that there is anything wrong with that, of course.

Growth is one thing, but rapid growth can be quite another. How has bMod dealt with the challenge of its rapid expansion?

We have been fortunate to have been awarded a number of brands in the last year. Kathryn and I had seen agencies become victims of their own success—unable to keep pace with themselves, never mind their clients. The biggest problem was their inability to bring in talented personnel to maintain the quality of service that had led to their growth in the first place. With bMod, we were determined not to let that happen.

Our strategy has been to seek out the best personnel we can find—individuals who embody the spirit of bMod and what we are all about. Bringing Murray Forrestall aboard as a partner is one of the key steps we have taken to keep us on track.

Murray has held management positions in sales, training, marketing and business technology at pharmaceutical companies including Solvay and Pfizer. He had also worked previously with both Kathryn and me on the supplier side, so we knew he was driven by the same client-orientation that has been so critical to bMod's success.

What accounts do you work on?

We currently partner with 16 brand teams, including Adalat XL[®], Lipidil EZ[™] and Viagra[®].

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The Montreal Studio.

The industry has changed considerably in recent years. What are your thoughts on global branding and assigning global brands to a single global ad agency—as opposed to clients working with local, domestic advertising agencies?

Obviously, as a private company, we don't have a lot to gain from global branding and assigning brands to a single global agency, so my negative opinion of the practice is admittedly for selfish reasons. I understand the desire of procurement departments in negotiating global rates, but I think the same negotiations and rates could occur with local agencies who are likely to be more in tune on the national and regional fronts.

It may not sound like a big deal, but I believe this shift in thinking could contribute significantly to brand momentum and success. Too often, the global approach is simply out of touch with Canadian needs.

If you could characterize bMod in a simple sentence or two, how would it read?

People who like what they do and do it extraordinarily well. People who say exactly what they mean. In fact, we've prepared this tongue-in-cheek guide with examples of how some agency lingo can be interpreted (Table 1).



Some of the Client Service Team in the Montreal office.

Table 1

The bMod guide to ad agency lingo: The truth behind the words

When some agency people say...	What they really mean
"The focus group was surprisingly insightful."	"We're back to freakin' square one."
"The layout has a very contemporary look."	"Our art director refused to make changes."
"We excel at patient lifestyle ads."	"You're killing us. We beg of you, please let us do some real creative."
"You want mock-ups for the meeting, right?"	"We missed the deadline."
"Spinjets. Mechanicals. Proofs. Kerning. Bleed. Stet. CMYK. RGB. Wirebound."	"We don't really know what the heck these terms mean either, but we think they make us sound important."
"We are waiting for the specs."	"We need to buy time to get caught up on this job."
"This is for training purposes only, right?"	"PAAB will kill this in about 3 seconds flat."
"Our creative director is a little eccentric."	"Our creative director has never actually physically harmed anyone, as far as we know."
"These web guys are fun to work with."	"These web guys don't have a clue about pharma."
"We're your global agency of record."	"You're stuck working with us."
"Are you kidding? We have tons of experience in your therapeutic area."	"We'll start surfing the Internet for info right after this meeting."
"Our staff is hot."	"Our staff is hot."

What sets bMod Communications apart from its competitors?

Let's face it, all ad agencies do pretty much the same thing. You might give the agency philosophy or methodology some cute or clever name, but at the end of the day it comes down to delivering on the promise for the client. Without spouting all sorts of lofty theories and hypotheses, we focus on what it takes to change the behaviour of our target audience. In fact, bMod is short for behaviour modification.

Advertising, regardless of the format it takes—print ad, detail aid, trade show booth, website or whatever—needs to cut through the clutter and connect emotionally with the target. There's nothing revolutionary in what I'm saying here. The bMod difference is that we actually strive to make this happen in every aspect of our work.

Ultimately, where a client or potential client is concerned, either the agency team is a good fit or it's not. bMod clients tend to like the fit. Our people are a huge part of the reason. You might say we're comfortable and edgy at the same time. Just like our advertising. **CPM**

For more information about bMod contact Eric Frendo, Kathryn Buck or Murray Forrestall at (888) 499 9889.