

Alumni Profile: Bill Dertilis (MBA '99)

Jennifer Hildebrandt talks to Bill Dertilis about working in a non-traditional MBA industry

Jennifer Hildebrandt: Describe your role as marketing director of L'Oréal Professional.

Bill Dertilis: L'Oréal has four divisions: Mass (L'Oréal Paris, Maybelline, Garnier); Luxury (Lancôme, Helena Rubenstein, Biotherm, Kiehl's, Giorgio Armani, Perfumes); Active Cosmetics (LaRoche-Posay, Vichy); and Professional (L'Oréal Professionnel, Redken, Matrix, Kérastase). Currently, I work as the marketing director for the Professional Division in Montreal, selling our products into professional salons and spas. My team and I make strategy decisions related to product launches, price, distribution, media, brand positioning and protection. We also handle all public relations related to our division, and work on events such as a new national competition for hairdressers under age 25, where the winner receives a placement to work at a fashion show in Paris.

JH: What aspects of your MBA do you call on most?

BD: The MBA developed my sense of rigor, my ability to multi-task, and gave me a holistic and integrative approach to my work. The launch of any product requires 360° thinking. You need to consider everything before it happens, and if you forgot something, well, that too! A good example was the launch of Men Expert that I worked on while I was in product development in France. I had to manage working with the labs on formula development and packaging compatibility testing; working with the creative agency on packaging, brand positioning and consumer testing of the concept; and pricing and sourcing of raw materials with our industrial group.

JH: How creative are you in your role? Has your creative thinking process evolved over time?

BD: L'Oréal is an extremely creative environment. Because of the loose structure, each individual has the license to create his or her own plan of action. The same product may be positioned and launched differently, depending on the country. Often when we think of creativity, especially with a cosmetics company, our first thoughts involve aesthetic aspects such as advertising, posters and displays. I have learned to move past aesthetics to apply my creativity on many levels, whether that means solving an out-of-stock situation; managing the new generation of workers (the infamous "Y" generation); or creating a bond between our brands and the hairdressers who use them.

JH: What are some of your career highlights to date?

BD: Pre-Rotman, I studied at Collège Calvin in Geneva, apprenticed with a Canadian fashion designer, tutored English in Kazakhstan, and did a brief stint in the Commercial Division at the Canadian Embassy in Mexico City (thinking I wanted to be a diplomat, but not being bureaucrat by nature.) Joining L'Oréal almost seven years ago after graduation, I started in L'Oréal Paris working on makeup, then skincare, and then haircolour. My next move was to Paris for two years, working in product development, specifically on the new L'Oréal Paris Men's Skincare line, *Men's Expert*, which has just launched in Canada. At L'Oréal's offices in France, I got involved in everything from packaging (making sure the plastics don't react poorly with the product formulas); to the perfume houses (seeing how different compositions blended); to focus groups gathering consumer insights and testing concepts. More recently, coming back to Canada to work in the Professional Division, I have learned even more about relationships and making sure that our communities feel connected to our brands.



JH: What is the most challenging aspect of your job?

BD: Keeping things in perspective – balancing my professional and personal lives. Everyone is so passionate at L'Oréal, that it's hard to separate yourself from it, even once you leave the office. Another challenge is prioritizing – there is so much to do and so little time that there is always a desire to maximize the outcomes, create the right relationships – a constant need to find the most bang for our buck.

JH: What do you do in your spare time?

BD: I enjoy learning about design, architecture and music, as well as studying the humanities – for example, the history and evolution of ideas and artistic expression. I tend to read more than one book at a time, so right now I have the following books open: *Big History*, *Bush on the Couch*, *No Logo*, *Bedtime Stories for Sleepless Nights* by Roald Dahl, and of course *Adbusters* (the magazine), just to keep me on my toes! I also manage to incorporate painting and drawing, cycling, yoga, cooking and travel (last Christmas, I visited Dubai) into my life whenever possible.