

CYBELLE SROUR: BLENDING DESIGN AND MANAGEMENT

By Jennifer Hildebrandt

AS vice president and brand director for Air Miles and Nestlé at **MacLaren McCann**, **Cybelles Srouer** (MBA '89) enjoys being a 'Don Quixote' of sorts – continually questioning the status quo and encouraging her team and clients to do the same.

"My job involves integrating teams (on the client and agency sides), and media (TV, direct mail, radio and Web)," she says. "Being responsible for multiple brands is both challenging and rewarding. My goal is to protect the integrity of my clients' brands across everything they do."

Integrative thinking comes naturally to Cybelle, whose 'outsider' perspective helps her take a broader approach to her clients' needs and problems. "One of the first integrated projects I worked on was the GM-sponsored Web site www.firstcar.com," she says. "This project aligned one customer group – first-time car buyers – across all of the different GM divisions. It was about providing a particular customer segment with targeted information and increasing the value proposition for them." The project started out as one slide in a small presentation she produced, but Cybelle's idea stuck, and the teams from the client and agency side were so energized by the project that they kept pushing the envelope. "The passion of the people behind the project broke all kinds of barriers between GM's divisions and encouraged them to integrate their business strategies to focus on one customer group," she says.

One of the challenges Cybelle faces in her industry is helping her clients focus on their long-term vision and understanding that their brand is more than just 'pretty pictures'. "The brand is a living, internal element of the organization, which is why the www.firstcar.com project was such a success: internally, all of GM's divisions started looking at this consumer group differently and examining how they presented their brand to this one group."

Cybelle works hard to motivate her team and her clients by keeping her sense of humour and by giving them the tools they need to break down any communication barriers. "I encourage our clients to question policies and procedures – both within their organization and in our agency."

Asked what her favourite part of the job is, Cybelle says it's "working closely with our creative team and clients and seeing new ideas implemented." She knows she's doing her job when she sees evidence of increased brand loyalty and "a whole company galvanized around a brand."

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Curiosity is an integral part of Cybelle's thought process and life. "When interactive advertising started a few years ago, I just had to know everything about how it worked – and it soon became part of my toolkit." Her Inquisitiveness places her in situations of opportunity as she continually looks at the gaps in her knowledge base, and strives to fill them in. "That allows me to sit down with clients and help them in a truly '360-degree' way."

Asked to name the most important thing her MBA taught her, Cybelle points to "the ability to work well in teams with different backgrounds. Balancing the strengths and weaknesses of team members and drawing out their different perspectives really adds value to a project," she says. "My MBA also provided a strong understanding of the concepts behind each functional discipline of business and an ability to 'connect the dots'."

In addition to her fulfilling work, Cybelle enjoys traveling to places such as Atlanta, London and New York. She also likes to participate in as many historic 'firsts' as possible – such as seeing the first baseball game played at the opening of Sky Dome. A self-proclaimed "groupie" of Canadian-born architect **Frank Gehry**, she tried in vain to get tickets to the sold out first concert at his new Disney Concert Hall. She also loves spending time with friends and family. "I'm proud to say I recently mastered the art of making Kraft Dinner for my nieces and nephews!" **RM**