

Interview with Roland Ehrler, Managing Director, Association of Swiss Advertisers (ASA)

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Two years after taking on the role of director of the Association of Swiss Advertiser (SWA-ASA), Roland Ehrler talks about the activities and the intention behind the new Swiss “Code of Conduct”.

How did you like your first two years at the SWA-ASA?

I still enjoy my job as much as I did the day I joined. There is a great deal to do and a lot of diversity. In the first year we had a particular focus on TV audience research, which still remains an important topic for us. But we also do research work for our members on all media, for measurement data to be as precise as possible.

What keeps you and your members busy, beside media research?

A recurring theme is pricing for media services. We are very alert and vocal in this field and act as a “price watchdog” whenever this is necessary. But we're also looking at regulatory issues, to make sure the Swiss advertiser market remains as liberal as possible. And we are engaged in the discussions on agency relationships – here we have model contracts and provide tailor-made advice to our members.

What is the role of the SWA expert groups?

As of this summer we have five permanent expert groups on marketing, media, digital, regulation and sponsorship. They give the association and its members an additional platform to address their issues in relation to the current market topics.

How has your membership evolved?

The SWA enjoys great popularity. In 2014 we had twenty new members, which brings the total number of members to 160. Together, our members represent roughly 75% of the marketing communications spend on the Swiss market.

What was last year's highlight?

Our annual meeting on “The future is mobile”, surely – the high attendance and our top speakers made it an absolute highlight! But I also enjoyed every contact with our members and market partners. I feel that the work of the association is appreciated and we are a sought-after contact on the market. This on different levels, so this year we became a member of the Economiesuisse Union. Also, we have strong ties with the international industry and we are an active member of the World Federation Advertisers.

The SWA-ASA recently launched a “Code of Conduct”. What do you want to achieve with this?

This Code of Conduct is a series of recommendations for a relationship of trust between advertisers, media agencies and media owners. It regulates the good practices expected from our industry.

Why this “Code of Conduct” now?

Our members often get enquiries on their position in the advertiser-agency-media owner triangle. Our position on standard contracts and our recommendations were always available to our members, but the results were not very tangible. Now, with this Code of Conduct, the rules of the game get more transparent, in our point of view.

With this Code of Conduct do you want to put more pressure on the media agencies?

No, that's certainly not the goal. But we are certainly looking for more transparency in terms of cash flows and for more clarity in general. Of course, this is already the case in many client-agency partnerships.

You have criticized the recent developments of the Swiss media prices. Where is the problem?

Both direct and indirect prices went up again for various media. We need to keep an eye on the market developments as we are here to defend the clients' interests. And, if necessary, we will take measures. Because let us not forget, companies invest about five billion Francs per year in the Swiss advertising market.

What are your plans for 2015?

We have big plans, for sure! We will continue focusing on the ongoing topics. That's one of our main priorities. Then, again, a unique annual meeting in spring for our members and guest and, finally, keep a close eye on the advertising market and get active whenever the association is needed – be it in the background or in the foreground if it is good for the cause.

What can the Swiss advertising industry expect from 2015?

Media usage will continue to change and digital will have a greater and greater share. Even though the advertising market stagnates, the media budgets get more and more split into different media channels. It is my belief that 2015 will be the year of digital media, with print continuing its decline. We can say more about this when the results of our advertising market survey in cooperation with BSW are out this spring.

Can you already give us a glimpse of what will happen at next annual meeting of the SWA?

It will take place on March 26 in Zurich with the slogan: "Creativity is king!" In today's complex media world, creativity is king more than ever: whether we talk about the product, the campaign, but especially when selecting a medium. There will be key speakers, such as Amir Kassaei, Chief Creative Director of DDB Worldwide from New York. Also, our association celebrates its 65th anniversary this year – and we're a long way from retiring (he laughs).