

Career Profile

Marion da Ponte – Entrepreneur, Advertising

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Rule number one in the world of advertising is “creativity is key”. But, what exactly is advertising? If you think it is simply an industry of catchphrases, then you already failed rule number one. Advertising is so much more! It is one of the most immersive and diverse careers in all of marketing, with career options from advertising agencies to media buying to public relations. Each career destination in advertising has any number of paths that can lead to it. Marion da Ponte, a 1987 Laurier graduate of the Honours BBA Co-op program, has provided some insight on her personal journey in the world of advertising.

As echoed in her professional career, Marion kept herself busy academically and personally throughout her time at Laurier. From the co-op summer baseball league to working as a teaching assistant, Marion was actively involved in Laurier life and always possessed a healthy outlet for school stress. One of Marion’s most valuable experiences professionally was her participation in the co-op program. Most pointedly, the program provided Marion with the ability to practice the applied lessons from her marketing classes in her position at IBM, a placement she held for three consecutive work terms. With her co-op experience solidifying her interest in the marketing world, Marion sought to concentrate on the advertising industry and following graduation in 1987, began work in media planning.

Following three years in media planning, Marion transferred to a sales role at a national magazine. Three years later, with several years of experience under her belt and the burning entrepreneurial spirit in her heart, Marion, her husband and another colleague started da Ponte + Richardson, a boutique full-service advertising representation firm. da Ponte + Richardson serviced a clientele of national magazines and it was their responsibility to sell print advertising into their respective clients’ magazine pages. After 12 years of growth, their largest magazine client, and subsequently da Ponte + Richardson themselves, were purchased by a Quebec-based communications company.

With such a sudden change in the tides, Marion went *against* the flow and decided to form da Ponte + Company. Marion brought two members from her previous team of 12 to accompany her to service their previous magazine clients. As owner of da Ponte + Company, Marion’s role was split into two primary responsibilities – internal and external. Internally, Marion managed and motivated her growing staff team, controlled the accounting and financial details of the business, and planned the creative and operational strategy of her firm. Externally, Marion interacted with clientele to ensure clarity and transparency in their work and acted in a facilitation role through the marketing of da Ponte + Company to the advertising industry.

Either dealing inside or outside of her company, Marion stressed only one commonality in her day-to-day responsibilities – variance. A day for an entrepreneur is ever-changing and as such, Marion had to be able to adapt to different situations. Relating to the advertising world itself, Marion emphasized several important personality characteristics that a potential advertising student should acquire. An optimistic perspective, relentless commitment and high self-esteem are compulsory in an industry with so much volatility. Strong organization and communication skills combined with a real sense of humour is necessary in a business that is both project and people-focused. Finally, as rule number one states, “creativity is key” and as such a “think outside the box” mentality is vital.

A motivated individual with the right characteristics has a great chance to make it in advertising industry and what an industry to be in! Marion underlines that her two favourite things about her career have been the satisfaction of success and the fulfillment of great people. At the same time, she acknowledges the struggles faced in advertising. The greatest challenge of all is the uncontrollable nature of the industry itself. So much happens outside of one’s hands that it can at times become very frustrating. Additionally, there is close to zero job security in advertising, especially if one follows an entrepreneurial route.

Marion profoundly enjoyed her time in the advertising world, but after 20 years in the field, she decided it was time for a change. After eight years leading da Ponte + Company, Marion began transitioning into interior design. Discovering her passion for the equally-artistic field during a personal home renovation, Marion became educated in her new industry and jumped right in. Currently, Marion and her contractor business partner operate Bridgemount Properties Inc., a successful large scale renovation company. Although Marion is no longer in advertising, she emphasizes that her entrepreneurial and creative skills are still utilized, just through a different outlet.

In the end, Marion says that any job, advertising or not, “truly needs to be fun”. She states that creativity may reign in advertising, but one must always remember that your sudden influx of creativity could be swiftly matched with some fluctuating event. Just as Marion did in university, she maintains healthy outlets of stress in her personal life (although it is no longer the co-op baseball league). So, take a *swing* at advertising and maybe you’ll *hit one out of the park!* (You know that some advertising will always be clichéd).