

Joanne Harmelin paved the way for female CEOs

CEO of Bala Cynwyd-based Harmelin Media discusses her vision of business growth.



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Much like Apple pioneer Steve Jobs, what started

out of someone's home has turned into a legit forward-thinking media company. Except Joanne Harmelin began hers in the '80s, when women weren't running much of anything. Now Harmelin Media has grown into a media-buying company that does strategic planning, negotiating and buying of all types of media. As an

extension of their digital media services, they have developed teams that focus on business intelligence and software development.

Harmelin spoke with Metro to discuss her storied career.

How did the company begin?

Harmelin Media started in 1982 in my den. At

that time, there were only a couple of employees and a couple of accounts, but we saw the potential impact of the computer on the media business and invested in the technology. Technology would help us work faster and cheaper. We could make an impact and change the way media was handled throughout the region.

We also initiated a high standard of customer service, which is part of our company philosophy to this day.

How did being in Philadelphia shape your advertising company?

Philadelphia is a big city with a small-town sense of community. Within a couple of years, we were volunteering our experience and expertise to several not-for-profit organizations in the city. The first one was the Juvenile Diabetes Association. We are still associated with and support them to this day. When you get involved with organizations like The Philadelphia Zoo, The Arden Theatre, The Arts and Business Council, The Police Athletic League and The Philadelphia Children's Alliance.

Who are some notable clients you have worked with?

Our first client was Encore Books. David Schlesinger was an entrepreneur who hired us to work on his first venture. He then went on to launch Zany Brainy and Five Below. Each time he hired us to help with his media buying. Other early clients included the Ford Dealers Association (still a client), Sunoco, Tropicana Casino, US Healthcare and subsequently AETNA. We've also done a lot of retail including Today's Man, David's Bridal, Boscov (still a client) and Belk. Blue Diamond, Region's Bank and El Pollo Loco are among other major clients.

What are the keys to success in an ever-changing industry?

Change, evolution and moving at warp speed to keep pace with the rapidly changing digital landscape and hiring smart people.

Where are you located now and how large is your company?

Our primary headquarters are in Bala Cynwyd, but we have a satellite office in California, New York and soon to be Pittsburgh. We currently have 235 employees and are looking for additional superstars.



Joanne Harmelin started her media company in 1982. PROVIDED

Do you work with influencers, linking them directly to clients?

When it is appropriate, we work with influencers but very carefully. Any negative publicity associated with an influencer can impact a brand. We are very protective of our client's brand and reputation.

What do you think about the social media boom in advertising?

It's phenomenal and it continues to grow. Clients are seeing real growth and response in this area. It changes daily and will continue to expand. We are experimenting with all kinds of social media and integrating it with traditional media to create multi-level marketing approaches.

What do you foresee in the next 35 years for Harmelin?

Well, first and foremost, growth. We continue to expand our services to meet client demand. We initiated an SEO discipline several months ago and it's thriving. Our clients are looking beyond media to engage us to solve other types of marketing problems for them. Our business intelligence unit works with clients to help interpret data and construct strategic solutions for all sorts of marketing problems beyond media. But one thing will never change: We remain committed to a high standard of excellence and customer service. It got us to where we are today and will never become obsolete.



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