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By Roberta Wax

Talking to reporters is second nature for Dick Lippin, but talking about himself is a different story. Usually, it's his clients who get all the ink, and the self-effacing publicist is just a bit embarrassed to be the focus of attention. But get him talking about the increasingly global scope of television marketing, and he's glad to oblige.

"Ten to fifteen years ago, the American view of the foreign market was mostly as a point of sale," he says, sitting in the conference room of the Lippin Group's Los Angeles office. But foreign buyers soon became Hollywood's creative partners as well, and putting together such relationships is where Lippin excels.

His goal, he explains, "is to bring clients together, to establish relationships, to be aware of what is going on international-

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ly." He also helps foreign clients gain market recognition at home by applying promotional skills honed domestically.

His expertise in international marketing and public relations impresses many in the industry. "Most of what I've learned about international marketing I've learned from Dick," says Jim Chabin, president and CEO of L.A.-based PROMAX, an international organization of promotion and marketing executives in all areas of electronic media.

"He has a fine mind and understands this business so well that he crosses borders and language barriers," Chabin adds. "There are very few people who have that combination of communication skills and problem solving. He's one of the most trusted people

in this town, is very discreet, and gets a quiet, almost confidential respect."

Chabin notes, for example, that when PROMAX wanted to expand its member services into Asia, "we were unsure of ourselves. Dick introduced us to people, and we eventually formed an agreement to put on a two-day seminar in Singapore. Dick's knowledge, suggestions, and names helped us put it together."

Besides having "real solid relationships," Lippin is also "on top of emerging technologies," notes Bruce Johansen, president and chief operating officer of the National Association of Television Programming Executives (NATPE International). "He's not only interested personally, but as a professional. He's not naive

when it comes to the incredible changes we're facing and is well versed in the convergence of all new methods of distribution and technology. He's an insightful person who has put together an incredible team of professionals. And he has a great sense of humor, which is a big plus in this pressure-cooker business."

Growing up, the New York native never thought of public relations as a career. A business and psychology major at Pennsylvania State University, he attended the MBA program at City University of New York before heading to the Institute of Finance to earn the licenses needed to work on Wall Street. On the Street, he became fascinated by two very different aspects of high finance — the immediate access to

breaking news and the psychology of why people invest. "So much [of a person's desire to invest] was not necessarily any particular knowledge [of a stock], but an excitement and belief that something good was going to happen," he explains.

He worked for a while at an investment firm and in the regulatory area at the New York Stock Exchange before moving into investor relations, corporate identity, and product marketing, among other areas.

When he segued into public relations around 1974, first with an agency and then with Richard Grant, his Wall Street background helped him understand "the business process, the financial goals of companies." It is that background, he believes, that enables him to be as much a business counselor as a publicist.

So when he opened up his own p.r. firm, the Lippin Group, in 1986, he knew his would not be a traditional agency. "I wanted us to be involved in both corporate counseling and strategy," he recalls. "I wanted to be involved in all aspects of the entertainment industry."

Today, he says, 75 percent of his business is in entertainment, both domestically and internationally. The rest involves corporate identity and product marketing for non-entertainment groups, including environmental organizations, business ethics groups, and social programs such as Free Arts for Abused Children. He sits on the board of several philanthropic and cultural groups, including the Kidney Foundation of Southern California and the Los Angeles Music Center. He was a founder of L.A.'s Museum of Contemporary Art.

With offices in New York, Los Angeles, and London, Lippin says he has tried to keep his firm from becoming a bureaucracy by being "conservative in growth and selective in what we do. I try not to get involved in things we don't know about.

"The industry has definitely changed," he observes. "Fifteen years ago a feature

would live or die on box-office success. Today there is a whole other aspect [home video, foreign sales, merchandising, et cetera]. I wanted to be involved in all those areas." Which meant his role as a public relations representative became all-encompassing, going well beyond the issuing of press releases about upcoming movies and TV shows.

"I don't look at Dick as just a p.r. person," says Randy Reiss, executive vice-president at Walt Disney Studios. "He's a great executive who happens to be in the entertainment area. He has a good overview of business and whatever problem I bring him. You can call him on any subject."

Lippin's first international client was the United Kingdom's Granada TV, and in the beginning, he did a lot of listening. "I learned that people in other parts of the world have different objectives and goals. I was very interested in the social and cultural differences and found I could begin to counsel people [in the U.S.] about that point of view."

And he also found that he could teach some of the promotional lessons learned in the U.S. to his clients abroad. For example, when his client Television New Zealand began to feel the pinch of competition in its previously two-channel market, Lippin showed the network "how we promote our TV shows here." He had promos created in the U.S. but geared specifically to the New Zealand market, using personalized interviews with the stars of such shows as *Beverly Hills, 90210*; *L.A. Law*; *Night Court*; and *The Simpsons*.

"All of a sudden, they had material they hadn't had before. They started to have a competitive advantage. What we take for granted in entertainment promotion was not known [elsewhere]."

Ultimately, Lippin says, international marketing, promotion, and financing will help the entire industry, because, to entice viewers, producers "will have to commit more money to creative people and to mar-

keting.

"Now when an American producer sits down to look at a project," Lippin continues, "he looks at subject matter, casting, et cetera, with the question, Would this be of interest to [foreign] viewers?"

This development has particularly influenced TV movies and miniseries, Lippin notes. When considering foreign markets these days, producers want themes that travel well and stories that are based either on popular books such as Alexandra Ripley's *Scarlett* or international news stories such as the downing of Pan Am 103. Likewise, the markets themselves are evolving. Lippin points in particular to the Pacific Rim, China, and Latin America as burgeoning areas, thanks to increasing TV ownership and more sophisticated distribution systems.

Lippin views the ever-changing entertainment industry as an opportunity for self-growth. A weekend at home not only includes time with daughter Alexandra, thirteen, and wife, Ronnie, who heads the company's music division, but also stacks and stacks of reading. "It really is my way of relaxing," he insists with a smile. "[But] it's important to know what's going on around the world. What other governments decide in political and regulatory changes becomes an integral part of the strategies we develop.

"If our value is one of being knowledgeable about our industry, the only way to stay on top is to read about what's going on. Every single day is a learning experience."

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