From Employment Law to Sports Marketing, This Exec Now Negotiates YouTube's Upfronts

Brian Albert has had a few careers, from employment law to sports marketing, Silicon Valley to Nascar race tracks. So when he courts advertisers for upfront ad commitments as Google and YouTube's managing director for U.S. agency video, he knows a thing or two from these different walks of life.

Two decades ago, Albert wasn't thinking about the future of television; he was riding the highs of the dot-com boom. He had originally followed his head—and his dad's advice—to law school, practicing at a firm for one year before making a drastic change. For the next five years, he'd follow his heart, working in sports marketing for professional tennis players like Steffi Graf. After the bubble burst, he co-founded and sold a loyalty program for Nascar.

It wasn't until 2010 that he joined Google and began the latest chapter of his peripatetic career.

At each step, job and sector, his end goals involved securing deals.

"Across every stage of my career, I've been negotiating deals, whether it's soliciting endorsement deals for professional athletes, making a sales pitch to drum up revenue for an early-stage startup or convincing advertisers that YouTube can deliver the results they need for their business," Albert said. "No matter the context, negotiating is part art, part science, which has made every deal a new and different challenge."

Albert’s work doesn’t stop at bringing advertisers to YouTube. Once they’re contracted, he also leads a creative team that works with brands and their agencies to produce the most effective ads for the platform.

YouTube’s foray into the streaming wars is multipronged. There’s YouTube Premium, a paid subscription on-demand service rife with original content; YouTube TV, an over-the-top linear television bundle; and, of course, the main YouTube platform, which over 2 billion logged-in users visit every month. YouTube Select, a new ad offering and a revamp of Google Preferred, is the company’s new upfront product, which lets advertisers reach viewers on YouTube’s most popular videos.

In an abnormal year, with the pandemic dynamically changing viewership habits and advertising priorities, Albert’s job is to make YouTube stand out from the pack.

“As we speak with buyers and agencies this year, we are working to understand where advertisers and agencies are at currently and be even more flexible and creative to meet them there,” he said.

Albert takes it one deal at a time.

Big Mistake

While working for a sports marketing agency early in his career, Albert boarded a plane to Tokyo to finalize an endorsement agreement. But when he arrived, he found out it was anything but a done deal. Executives scrutinized the deal from top to bottom, but he hadn’t done his homework. He returned home without a signed contract and negotiations were delayed for weeks.

Lesson Learned

He took an important lesson from the Tokyo incident: “Always know what you’re walking into.”

How He Got the Gig

Albert came to Google after reconnecting with a former colleague who had just started there. “It was serendipitous because I didn’t have a digital media background at the time, but I was in the right place at the right time,” he recalled.

Pro Tip

“If you’re going to play chess, not checkers, in a negotiation, you’re going to need to spend two to three times preparing versus the actual time you spend negotiating,” he said.

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