



MARKETING STAR



Marketing Consultant Laura Ries Excels in the Family Business

[By Kenneth Davis]

Marketing and advertising have always been in Laura Ries' blood. From a very early age, she aspired to have a career in the marketing field, and the environment in which she grew up played a big part in that. Her father, Al Ries, is a renowned marketing strategist and the author of several groundbreaking books on marketing.

"My dad has been in the business forever," she said. "So growing up, I was always exposed to advertising and marketing, and I was always drawn to it. I used to go to the office with my dad, and we talked about the commercials that were on TV. He's got a real passion for it, so I think it just grew in me as well, and it was a way to connect with him."

Today, not only does Ries get to work in a career that she loves, but she also has the added bonus of getting to do it alongside her father. In 1994, she and her father founded Ries & Ries, a leading marketing-strategy firm based in Atlanta. The firm is a two-person operation: Ries is the president, and her father is the chairman. They help clients find ways to improve their marketing strategies and make their brand names more sellable.

"We do overall marketing branding strategy in terms of 'What does your brand own in the mind of the consumer?'" Ries said. "So the power of a company is the value of its brand in the mind of the consumer. So the way to build a powerful brand is by standing for something in the mind, and that's why focus is so important—singularity is so important—and why some of the world's top brands are those that really own one word and have not expanded and tried to be everything to everyone but have gone in the opposite direction and [tried to] be one thing to one group of people."

"For example," she continued, "Volvo and safety is a great example of a company that has done just that. They're nothing else and did it at a time where everyone has tried a safety campaign, but no one has really gotten much traction because Volvo got there first and owns that in the mind of the consumer."

Ries said that her firm conducts one-day strategy sessions with its clients.

"We spend a day working with them developing a strategy with them, interacting with them to get them talking about it and figuring out what exactly their brand needs to do," she said. "And that certainly depends on the situation; if it's a new brand starting

out, we might be figuring out what the name is or what the category's called. Or it could be an established brand that has to deal with competition and whatever's going on within the brand itself in terms of "Is it over-expanded, or should it expand?"

Although the firm has two offices, its headquarters in Atlanta and an office in Buckhead, it conducts most of its strategy sessions onsite with clients, said Ries.

Ries & Ries' clients range from Global 100 companies to small startups. Some of its well-known clients have included Burger King, Merck, AT&T, Xerox, Frito-Lay, and IBM.

Ries and her father have collaborated on four books—some of which have become bestsellers—that pertain to advertising, marketing, and branding issues. The titles are *The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding* (1998), *The 11 Immutable Laws of Internet Branding* (2000), *The Fall of Advertising and the Rise of PR* (2002), and *The Origin of Brands* (2004). She said they attract many of their clients through their books.

They also draw clients through their speaking engagements. She and her father travel across the globe giving presentations and conducting seminars.

Q. What are your hobbies and interests?

A. Horseback riding, weightlifting, photography, skiing, and tennis.

Q. What's in your CD player or on your iPod?

A. Sarah McLachlan, my favorite artist of all time. She's even on my ringer on my phone.

Q. What's the last magazine you read?

A. *Advertising Age*.

Q. What's your favorite TV show?

A. *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*.

Q. Who's your role model?

A. That's easy: my dad.



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"Generally speaking, the topics are related to our books," she said. "They basically usually want you to talk about whatever your latest book is, so we customize those speeches to the individual audience to make sure it's relevant to them [...] We've got thousands upon thousands of slides that we work with and have a very interactive kind of experience in terms of pictures. It's not your typical PowerPoint bullet presentation."

Next month, Ries and her father are traveling to China to give an all-day presentation. She said that, for the most part, they do their speaking engagements separately, unless it's an all-day seminar. And when they speak together, she said, they tag-team it: "He speaks for an hour, I speak for an hour, and so on."

Ries discussed what it's like running a business with her father:

"It's terrific! He's a great person, and I think there's nothing better than family in many ways. In this way, my family time is also my work time, and we have a great relationship, and I certainly treasure the time we get to spend together and traveling the world. I feel very lucky that I can have that experience [...] It's a very rewarding experience. I mean, it's definitely not like *The Devil Wears Prada* around here."

Ries has also appeared on a number of news shows as a marketing critic to share her views on news stories that relate to marketing, advertising, and branding matters.

"Generally speaking, it's in response to a news event," she said. "They might be doing a story on HP [Hewlett-Packard] or Kodak or somebody, and they want an expert opinion or whether or not their latest advertising campaign is a good move—whether or not I like it."



Ries has appeared on CNN, CNBC, Fox News, the CBS Morning Show, and ABC World News Tonight. She said she enjoys appearing on television.

"I've never been shy of a camera," she said. "And that's obviously very helpful in this business because you have to build your brand, and the way to do that is through PR."

She has been quoted in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, and *Advertising Age*, among other publications. Additionally, she and her father have been profiled in a number of major advertising and business publications. Ries also writes a blog.

Ries attended Northwestern University's School of Communication in Evanston, Illinois, where she was a radio, TV, and film major. She finished in the top 2% of her class in 1993. Following graduation, Ries worked as an account executive at TBWA Advertising in New York City. She left TBWA after being there a year to establish Ries & Ries with her father in 1994.

Ries discussed the qualities she believes a person needs in order to be successful in her field:

"I think in general an open mind," she said. "A hunger for knowledge. A relentless pursuit of information. I think what's given us an edge is just voraciously reading and watching and studying history and keeping up to date with what's going on now so you can hopefully predict what's going to happen in the future. Nobody knows, but the best way to predict the future is by studying the past, so knowledge is really the key."

Ries was born in New York City. She has been married for 10 years and has two boys, aged five and one.

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