Can you describe the mission of AT&T AdWorks and your role there?

Maria Mandel Dunsche: Our mission is to deliver the most relevant messages to consumers and help advertisers connect with them online, via mobile and on TV platforms. Our competitive advantage is that we use anonymous AT&T data to segment and target audiences and reach them through advertising across multiple screens.

“Educating the marketplace about the value of an audience-based buy is a top priority.”

I’m helping build the AT&T AdWorks brand and awareness in the marketplace for what we’re doing. I also assist our team with strategy and planning for high-value accounts and pitches.

Who are some of your customers?

Mandel Dunsche: We have all the top national advertisers and work across industry verticals. We’re a top-five online audience network, according to comScore. We have 186 million monthly unique visitors online, and 160 million monthly unique users on mobile platforms. On TV, we have 12.7 million AT&T U-verse set-top boxes, and our AT&T AdWorks Television Audience Network has a reach of more than 37 million households. We have tremendous scale.

What are your top business priorities?

Mandel Dunsche: My priorities center on building awareness around AT&T AdWorks and our product offerings. We’re a relatively new player in this space even though AT&T is a well-known brand. Educating the marketplace about the value of an audience-based buy is a top priority.
Traditionally, advertisers have purchased more on a contextual basis or used search- and performance-based marketing tools. The concept of an audience-based buy is relatively new, so we’re educating the marketplace around how to do it with better, more relevant data.

Our value proposition is to find and target audiences based on the data we have that nobody else has access to. We also want to grow advertisers’ spend in each media channel. The idea of cross-platform advertising is of great interest to advertisers, but there’s not a lot of spend in this area because nobody’s really cracked the nut on how to do it. There’s a big difference between multiplatform, siloed advertising and true cross-platform advertising.

How do you and your team use eMarketer?

Mandel Dunsche: We use eMarketer a lot. From an internal perspective, we use it to educate ourselves on what’s going on in the marketplace and to look at projections in the marketplace. We use it to look at where the different marketing opportunities are, to guide us as to how we should be developing our products and to look at various trends by channel. We also use it for client proposals and to look at industry-specific information. eMarketer has done great case studies, and some of the interviews you do with key leaders in the space are certainly helpful proof points that we incorporate into presentations and conversations with clients. It’s been a valuable resource.

“eMarketer is definitely a trusted source that helps me understand what’s going on in the industry.”

The other day I was working on a presentation on mobile marketing, and I was looking at data on mobile spending by channel and tactic, as well as messaging, display, rich media and video trends. I was building a case for some of the emerging rich media and video-based advertising that we’re doing in mobile and to show how the marketplace is moving more toward rich media and video-based mobile activity.

What are some of the challenges in getting advertisers to think about audience-based buying and cross-platform ad opportunities?

Mandel Dunsche: Siloed budgets and buying structures are creating some challenges for the concept of cross-platform buying. But agencies are starting to address this. We’re starting to see some consolidation on the digital side with online and mobile and even on the TV side.

We’re trying to showcase the value of the cross-platform buy. We’re looking at performance-based measures like linking the buy back to either online or offline sales, and we’re showing how approaching things from a cross-platform perspective can help maximize the impact that advertisers have in the market.

How are you navigating the pace of change?

Mandel Dunsche: The pace of change is certainly one of the largest challenges in media today. You have to stay on top of things. I have a number of trusted sources—eMarketer is definitely a trusted source that helps me understand what’s going on in the industry.

Through our labs at AdWorks, we’re trying to synthesize all of the trends and educate our clients about the opportunities and what’s coming in the near future.

What keeps you enthused about this business?

Mandel Dunsche: I’ve been in this industry almost 20 years. I’m truly a marketer at heart, and what’s exciting to me is that digital is moving toward the Holy Grail of marketing—matching the right messages with consumers when they’re most receptive to them.

It’s not a new concept, but it really excites me because it’s not just about banging consumers over the head with ads that may or may not be for something they’re interested in. It’s about being able to profile and segment audiences based on their interests in aggregate in an anonymous way. Privacy is really important in the industry.