

BAY AREA REPORTER

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BUSINESS

Landis achieves PR success

by Katharine Holland

Editor's note: A new monthly feature spotlighting an LGBT businessperson.

This month's profile is David Landis, president/CEO of Landis Communications Inc.

David Landis called to let me know that he was celebrating 15 years of business. I thought, not bad for the owner of a business that has seen many ups and downs during recent years, including the dot-com boom and bust. Once I found out he had been named one of the nation's top PR Firms by *PR Week*, I decided to take a closer look. With 15 full-time staff at his 1388 Sutter Street office, Landis is a passionate philanthropist and volunteer whose clients include NBC Universal, Whole Foods Market, Organic Valley, Cold Stone Creamery, California State Parks Foundation, San Francisco Symphony, and the San Francisco SPCA.

What do your clients want?

We sit down with clients at the beginning of the relationship and ask them, "What does success mean?" Once we have defined that, we can achieve it.

What does the media want?

The media wants timely information and news. Having spent four years in local TV at KPIX I understand that firsthand. The challenge and creative part of pub-



David Landis of Landis Communications Inc.

lic relations (and the most rewarding part of the business) is figuring out how to take what your client does and find the news.

What was your most successful PR activity?

There are so many to choose from: the opening of the Asian Art Museum; the re-opening of Davies Symphony Hall and Union Square; the launch of Gap's Old Navy brand and opening 600 stores nationwide; and our "State of the State Parks" annual report card for the California State Parks Foundation.

What was your worst client appointment?

Once we were in the midst of a new business meeting and it turned out that what this company did was promote the sales of

MBTE, the additive to gasoline that causes cancer. In the middle of the meeting, I stood up and told the gentleman that we weren't the right fit.

What is your motto?

If you're not having fun, what's the point?

Most memorable moment in your career?

Winning a national Emmy Award and being at the reception in New York to see our station receive it [see below]. That, and opening my business 15 years ago.

Hardest thing you have ever done in your career?

I once auditioned on the piano at Six Flags in St. Louis with a backup band behind. We had to sight read and I blew it. I knew then I would never have a career as a professional pianist!

How do you motivate yourself?

I get motivated by creativity - and in our business, that happens on a daily basis.

Achievement of which you are most proud?

When I was in-house at KPIX-TV, we began a program - the first of its kind in the country - called *AIDS Lifeline*. This was back in 1987, when even the most liberal folks around weren't uttering the word AIDS. Our program was not only stationwide, meaning we had news coverage, PSAs, documentaries, and a sales component, but

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we syndicated it to 55 stations nationwide - and the program won a national Emmy Award. That award still hangs in the lobby at KPIX and it's one of the things for which I'm most proud. That education program helped save lives at a critical time when our government wasn't even talking about the disease.

What is going to be your next career goal?

My partner says playing the piano in the Holiday Inn lounge. I think it's volunteering for great nonprofits that I've worked with over the years, like Project Open Hand and ODC San Francisco.

Who is your mentor or role model in business?

Believe it or not, I think Martin Luther King Jr. is a great mentor - not just for his humanitarian role, but as a business leader. He taught me that the way to be successful in business - or in life - is to find a way for everyone to win. And, I've also learned a lot from watching Donald Trump on *The Apprentice*.

What are your tricks of the trade?

Always be true to yourself and your clients.