

BRANDTECH

Interview with BSL



The Agence M.P. Berthoud provides the best locations to highlight luxury and finance brands in Geneva

To remain present in their customers' minds and attract new prospects, many famous brands use a variety of tools to multiply contacts and ensure that their brand remains constantly in the minds of the public.

In the age of digital technology and the immediacy of social networks, let's take a look at the illuminated signs around the Rade de Genève, a particularity and part of the identity of the city, just like the Jet d'Eau and the Horloge Fleurie. The Rade and its skysigns contribute to the international reputation of Geneva and the influence of the brands that have settled on its roofs.

BSL: Norbert Nicolau, can you tell us a little more about the illuminated advertising on the Rade de Genève?

Norbert Nicolau: The prestigious and elegant illuminated signs that light up the Rade de Genève on Lake Geneva are a true signature of the city. First appearing in the mid-1930s and popular with luxury brands and the financial world, they are now part of the collective imagination of Geneva and have been a part of the city's landscape for many generations, so much so that without them the city would not look quite the same at night. Many

brands have understood this and want to associate themselves with the image of international Geneva. For a brand, access to the best locations allows it to enter the exclusive circle of renowned houses that benefit from such exceptional visibility. The Rade de Genève is THE place of choice for illuminated signs. It is a showcase that enhances the brand day and night, 365 days a year, allowing it to differentiate itself from its competitors, especially as locations are limited and the Rade de Genève is an area protected by numerous restrictive administrative regulations to preserve the harmony of this exceptional setting.



Norbert Nicolau
CEO of Agence M.P. Berthoud



BSL: Agence MP Berthoud was created over 60 years ago. Can you tell us more about it?

Norbert Nicolau: The agency is the historical partner of brands wishing to establish themselves on the Rade de Genève. It is like a long-established old lady who knows everyone and who arranges things discreetly to the satisfaction of advertisers, building owners and authorities.

The agency, founded by Marie-Pierre Berthoud, is currently the Swiss market leader for illuminated roof signs. She first worked as a freelancer and then created a legal structure in 2010. Pioneer in her time, her only motivation was to make her clients' signs shine thanks to luminous installations. Knowing the real estate market as well as the luxury brands and banking sectors, she was well-known on the Geneva market and had access to exceptional locations. At that time, the agency was very discreet, almost confidential, only known among closed circles. Today, with the importance of digital influence, we have adopted a reverse strategy: to continue its development, the Agence M.P. Berthoud must now have strong visibility and become more widely known.

BSL: You joined Agence M.P. Berthoud in 2017, after 30 years of experience in media and real estate. Why did you turn to illuminated signs ?

Norbert Nicolau: This twofold career path, combining media marketing and real estate, naturally led me to Agence M.P. Berthoud which, by virtue of its activities, is a perfect synthesis of these two professional worlds.

Very attached to this city, I wanted to buy a company to develop. When the opportunity arose, it seemed natural to me to take over this old Geneva company with my partners from Norman Venture Office. We were originally looking to invest in a start-up but we were delighted to discover this agency and its history and I don't regret it for a moment.

BSL: Who are your main customers?

Norbert Nicolau: We work mainly with the luxury, financial and innovation sectors. Among the brands that display their name on the

roofs on the lakefront, first of all there are established brands, independent ones or belonging to large international groups such as LVMH, Richemont or Swatch Group asserting their status. Indeed, the Rade de Genève is home to more than ¾ of the 25 most important watch brands, according to the annual monitoring of Morgan Stanley. But we also find more and more young luxury and financial brands eager to gain visibility and legitimacy such as emerging Fintech players, online banks or even cryptocurrency stars...

BSL: At a time when everyone is talking about digital and social networks, what is the interest of advertising signs?

Norbert Nicolau: These advertisers' motivations are very varied... the most subjective but still current remains the ego... "as soon as the others are there, I have to be there!", especially when you are a prestigious brand from Geneva and your friends, customers and collaborators pass in front of it every day.

But there are many objective reasons for these brands and for the communication professionals who manage their image...

First of all, the privileged public present or passing through Geneva represents a gigantic economic potential for all these brands. The population of Geneva is exposed to the advertising 365 days a year, the Swiss people passing through, whether commuters, tourists or business people, delegates of the many international organizations and conventioners who regularly come to work and spend money in Geneva and of course, the tourist clientele from the four corners of the world, including those from the Gulf countries and the Far East... in direct proximity to the boutiques on the rue du Rhône and the private banks in the area. There is also the communication medium itself, which is part of the OOH strategy of the brands benefitting from exclusive visibility 365 days a year and 24 hours a day, which makes it possible to multiply contacts with customers and increase notoriety beyond Geneva, since the images of the Rade and its illuminated signs are regularly displayed on media throughout the world and brought back from vacations in the souvenir photos of tourists...

In addition, there are more and more new advertisers who integrate other more strategic reasons such as HR communication to develop the desirability of their brand and attract new talent... There are also those who seek to strengthen their image with the



many investors present in Geneva, to raise funds or with a view to an IPO for example.

Finally, and this is perhaps the main advantage of this medium in an age of instantaneous digital consumption, the brands have the advantage of long-term visibility. Even if you don't necessarily see them at first glance, they permeate the subconscious mind of passers-by and permanently associate these houses with the local landscape.

BSL: Why do these advertisers come to Agence M.P. Berthoud?

Norbert Nicolau: The agency is the historical reference partner for advertisers and building owners. It is therefore quite natural that people come to consult us. But beyond that, they come looking for an exclusive turnkey service because we accompany them throughout the process which can be complex.

Our offer begins with the consolidation and ongoing development of a portfolio of properties. This involves discussions with owners and their representatives to identify the best locations. The brands then inform us of their wishes by choosing an available location in our portfolio adapted to their visibility strategy. The second step is the legal phase devoted to obtaining the necessary authorizations. We are used to working with local authorities and owners or their representatives, and always find satisfactory solutions for all parties. Then we take care of the coordination of the works to equip the roof of the building, both for the installation of the infrastructure and for the supports and power supply. At the same time, the sign is manufactured by our partners in coordination with the client's marketing department according to the local regulation (the project being submitted to the authorities and the owner for validation). Finally, we proceed with its installation, taking into account the various safety regulations both on the roof and in the perimeter. In addition, we guarantee 24/7 maintenance of the site so that the sign shines every day of the year.

When we work with houses like those of our partners, we guarantee them support and high quality service.

BSL: Is the Rade de Genève a limited place to develop your activities?

Norbert Nicolau: The Rade is a prime location for brands in Geneva. It offers exceptional visibility with a magnificent natural and architectural setting, but the number of locations is limited by nature and there is little rotation between advertisers, proof that the brands present continue to value this medium.

As a result, we are looking to expand in Switzerland and internationally, but also to innovate by bringing new technical solutions to the domestic market. Depending on the opportunities and local regulations, the agency also offers permanent or site-specific advertising banners, as well as giant screens broadcasting digital content and virtual reality.

As such, we have strengthened the team by hiring this year an expert in the luxury world and watchmaking who has worked for over 20 years with the biggest brands. Philippe Perret du Cray is helping us with our development in German-speaking Switzerland and abroad, where we are looking for exclusive opportunities for our clients, particularly in China, New York, Paris, Cannes, London, Dubai and Berlin. The end of this year and 2023 are full of surprises that we will tell you about soon.

BSL: And today, how do you position yourself in relation to trends seeking to limit, or even eliminate advertising in Geneva under the pretext that it is a nuisance?

Norbert Nicolau: This is a topic that has come to the forefront in recent years. It is about ideological jousts that do not really concern us and which on the contrary could represent an oppor-



tunity for illuminated signs. Indeed, the current majority wishes to make advertising signs disappear from public space. However, although they are visible from the street, signs occupy private roofs. Moreover, the Geneva regulation on the development of the Rade implicitly protects the installation of signs since it requires building owners to provide a device on the roof ... The agency should not be impacted by this trend and we will surely benefit from a transfer of OOH budgets.

We also see the threat of certain demagogic measures aimed at reducing light pollution and “unnecessary” energy consumption. Here again, a few explanations are enough to show that the LED signs under our management in Geneva are a rather “green” media.

Indeed, as for ecological and sustainable concerns Agence M.P. Berthoud uses, for its illuminated signs, the latest LED technologies which are very much appreciated by customers and owners, because they allow an unequalled lifespan, an instantaneous quality of lighting, as well as very low power consumption compared to the previous use of neon tubes which gave off heat and an unstable light intensity. LED signs are known to be environmentally friendly as all materials used are recyclable and they use only a few watts of power. Since they need low power, they are cheaper to operate and consume less electricity. As an example, the annual electricity consumption of a medium-sized sign is three times less than that of a space heater used 8 hours a day during 6 months, given that the electricity in Geneva by the SIG is 100% sustainable... A card to play in the face of digital technology which, as everyone knows, is highly energy-consuming.

For more than 60 years, Agence M.P. Berthoud, in close collaboration with the competent local authorities, has been accompanying its partners in the watchmaking, jewelry and private banking industries as well as building owners, in order to position their brands in the best possible way on available sites in Switzerland and abroad, while respecting the regulations in

force to guarantee maximum visibility. Our mission, in collaboration with all our institutional and private partners, is also to contribute to the enhancement of Geneva’s heritage and its Rade. ■

An illuminated sign on the Rade de Genève is important for the Maison BOVET. It embodies our attachment to Geneva, the capital of fine watchmaking. It is also a way for us to mark our attachment to the Grand Prix d’Horlogerie de Genève, which has rewarded us on several occasions, notably with the prestigious Aiguille d’Or.

BOVET is a fully integrated Haute Horlogerie Manufacture with presence in three Swiss cantons. We are celebrating our Bicentenary in 2022 and our illuminated brand name offers us great visibility to the collectors from all over the world who visit Geneva.

Our rooftop sign marks our presence in the city and sends a strong, luminous and positive signal. It perfectly complements our other institutional communication media.

In this context, we are very happy to collaborate with Agence MP Berthoud. In addition to their expertise and quality of service, we greatly appreciate their listening skills and a great human relationship that we only have with trusted partners.

Pascal Raffy • Owner of La Maison BOVET