

# BRANDTECH

Norbert Nicolau, CEO M.P. Berthoud Agency

## WE PROMOTE BRANDS IN GENEVA HARBOR

### **BSL: The M.P. Berthoud Agency was created more than 50 years ago. Has its operation changed since?**

**Norbert Nicolau:** Swiss leader in illuminated building roof signs, the agency was founded by Marie-Pierre Berthoud. At first, she worked under an independant statut and then created a legal structure in 2010. Pioneer for her time, her only motivation was to make her clients' brands shine through light installations. Knowing both the real estate market and luxury brands, she had a great reputation in Geneva and had access to exceptional locations. At that time, the agency was very low-key, almost confidential, only known to closed circles. Today, with the influence of digital, we have adopted a reverse strategy: to continue its development, the M.P. Berthoud agency must now have high visibility and take center stage.

### **BSL: You joined the M.P. Berthoud agency in 2017, with nearly 30 years of experience in both the media and real estate. What is your background?**

**Norbert Nicolau:** In 2005, I joined Goldbach Group-IP Multimedia, RTL Group's advertising agency for the Swiss market. This European leader in digital and electronic media notably has 38 television channels as RTL, M6, Cartoon Network, MTV, NTV, 6ter, C8, W9 in its portfolio. This experience introduced me to the world of media investments and the brand visibility strategy on the Swiss market. Then, I turned to Swiss real estate by joining the Anglo-American real estate group IWG-Regus, a world leader in business centers and workspaces. As General Manager of the Geneva unit, I have worked as well with local authorities and building owners as local, national and international real estate investment funds. This two-

headed journey, combining media marketing and real estate, naturally led me to the M.P. Berthoud agency which, through its activities, is a perfect synthesis of these two professional worlds.

### **BSL: What kind of outdoor advertising formats (OOH) do you propose?**

**Norbert Nicolau:** Our core business is spectacular outdoor, in other words, illuminated signs on the roof top of buildings. We use the latest LED technologies which are highly appreciated by our clients and building owners, as they allow unmatched lifespan, instant quality of lighting, as well as very low power consumption compared to previous use of the tubes neon lights which emitted heat and an unstable light intensity and which could also generate noise pollution.

This activity is governed by Geneva regulations, and the locations of these skysigns are subject to Swiss legislation on commercial leases.

These illuminated building roof top signs have been fully integrated into the landscape of the Geneva harbor for many generations. They are, moreover, such a part of the heritage of international Geneva that they have been immortalized in a painting by a Geneva painter in the lobby of the Hôtel de Ville. The brands have understood this and want to associate themselves with the image of international Geneva. We also propose the installation of advertising tarpaulins during building renovations in Switzerland, outside the canton of Geneva, and internationally, Geneva standards being more restrictive for this type of advertising.



## Rental of premium locations for roof top signs

Finally, the M.P. Berthoud agency supports its clients internationally for the installation of giant latest technology LED screens, very popular on facades in Las Vegas, NYC, London, Hong Kong and Singapore, not yet permitted in Switzerland.

### **BSL: In the services you provide, can you tell us about "premium full service": what does that imply?**

**Norbert Nicolau:** Our offer starts upstream, with the consolidation and permanent development of a property portfolio both in Switzerland and abroad. This process involves discussions with the building owners and their representatives. The brands then let us know what they want by choosing a location available in our portfolio and suited to their visibility strategy without necessarily being present nearby (through their stores or offices). Our renewable rental contracts have a term of 5 to 10 years. The second step is dedicated to the legal phase for obtaining the necessary authorizations. We are used to work with local authorities and building owners or their representative, and always find solutions that are satisfactory for all parties. Then, we take care of the coordination of the work to fit out the roof top of the building, both for the installation of the infrastructure as for the supports and the power supply. In the same time, the brand is manufactured by our partners in coordination with the client's marketing department. Brands can choose the size of the sign according to their brand image, the dimensions being submitted to the authorities and the building owner for validation. Usually on the roadstead, we offer one meter in height, a rule imposed by the authorities, over 5 to 20 meters in length, depending on the dimensions of the location chosen for the sign. Finally, we proceed to its instal-



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lation, taking into account the different safety rules both on the roof and in the perimeter. In addition, we guarantee 24/7 maintenance of the site.

### **BSL: What kind of clients are you reaching with this offer?**

**Norbert Nicolau:** We work mainly with the luxury goods, finance, insurance and technology sectors. Currently, our clients are mainly brands of international companies, but our goal is to open up to more independent brands, which also have their place in the harbor! Among our long-standing clients, we have a great harmony between well-established leaders, such as the Richemont, Swatch Group or even LVMH groups, and challengers, which seek to improve their visibility and to enter in the happy few circle.

### **BSL: What is the advantage for building owners to have an illuminated sign on their roof top ?**

**Norbert Nicolau:** The purpose of our services is to help building owners to optimize their rental status. In the same way as the rental of offices, apartments or parking spaces, the rental of the roof brings additional income which goes into the yield and finances the maintenance work of the building. Beyond the financial side, the building owner can also enhance his property thanks to the prestige that the brand represents, real add value.

### **BSL: What are the most famous locations in Geneva?**

**Norbert Nicolau:** La Rade, large or small, is the place of choice for retailers in Geneva, "the Place To Be". The Ge-



Frédéric Lauchenauer • Norbert Nicolau • Ali Kheloui

**About Norman Venture Office (NVO)**

*Founded by Ali Kheloui, Frédéric Lauchenauer and Norbert Nicolau, three passionate about investing in international technology start-ups and particularly in Africa, Norman Venture Office (NVO) is a service platform entirely dedicated to entrepreneurs and investors wishing to provide innovation in the market and develop their business. Built on the foundations of a Swiss family trustee for more than 30 years, the company offers both the classic services of a trustee with the accounting, the legal audit of accounts, the C-Level (CFO, COO, CHR, CMO) part-time, the advisory as well as services focused on the activity of the entrepreneur, among including reviewing the business model, setting up dashboards and providing strategic advice. Supporting clients in the development of their projects with the accounting company for the accounting history, NVO is at the crossroads of venture capital funds, private investors, SMEs and start-ups, multinationals and international organizations.*

*To summarize, NVO is a one stop shop of service providers working together seamlessly bringing business owners and investors regular financial overviews to make the appropriate decisions. Its group of part-time managers support the growth of your company and implementation of your strategy. It also provides advisory services in M&A, DD, Go-to-market and Marcom with MP Berthoud Agency.*

*The M.P. Berthoud agency is a strategic partner of NVO which is in line with the current trend in the market for audit and consulting firms to acquire a communication agency in order to promote its image and that of its clients.*

neva regulation is an advantage of our city in the sense that, even if it is complex, we manage to find compromises, contrary to Lugano, for example, where the majority of the city center is classified as a historical heritage regulation therefore difficult to access to signs. La Rade also offers exceptional visibility with both magnificent natural and architectural settings. It is incomparable with the narrow streets of Zürich, even if the latter is very busy with our clients! That said, depending on their strategies and on our advice, some brands prefer to focus on urban planning and transport coordination nodes, such as stations or airports.

**BSL: The M.P. Berthoud agency has been in this niche market for more than 50 years: have you noticed any new trends in the sector?**

**Norbert Nicolau:** I see above all the upheavals in the market with the arrival of digital, the new means of communication for brands. If, a few years ago, the big Houses should not hear about it, today all dedicate part of their budget to it. The objective today is therefore to find a good complementarity and diversification between the two to reach all clients! Being in the harbor is a setting that enhances the brand 365 days a year, day and night, and which allows it to differentiate its competitors, especially knowing that the locations are limited. The objective of international brands is to have an entry into the Swiss market and for a Swiss brand, it is to have its Swiss passport! ■

