

Superbrands drive Romania forward

Business Review sat down with **Catalina Rousseau**, president & CEO of BDR Associates - Strategic Communication Group, to learn about Superbrands, one of the company's flagship projects, and how the firms that gain such recognition can change Romania's image.

By **Anda Sebesi**

— ABOUT —

CATALINA ROUSSEAU

PRESIDENT AND CEO, BDR ASSOCIATES
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CATALINA ROUSSEAU FOUNDED BDR ASSOCIATES COMMUNICATION GROUP BACK IN 1995. SHE HAS MORE THAN 22 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT, AND IS HIGHLY SPECIALIZED IN DESIGNING, PLANNING AND COORDINATING PR AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES TO ASSIST PRIVATE NATIONAL AND MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES, GOVERNMENTAL OR INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN ROMANIA, REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, AND OTHER MARKETS.



What can you tell us about Superbrands, one of your flagship projects?

Each Superbrands edition represents a beautiful year-long journey for all those on board: brands themselves, their talented brand guardians, distinguished jury members, competent researchers from the IPSOS institute and the local Superbrands team, which have made things happen, for almost 13 years now. The previous edition was dedicated to Romania's centenary, under the evocative title, 100 Years, Centuries Ahead. We are encouraged

and motivated from one edition to another to be more creative and innovative. Our key target is to keep putting brands in full light, bringing recognition to their substantial contribution to building strong pillars for the economic development and prosperity of us all, in Romania. We are committed to paying responsible tribute to brands' genuine performance and to keep telling the beautiful story of those outstanding companies and people who make the difference in this market through branding culture.

What is new this year?

Superbrands TV (SBTV) is now one of the important trends developed by Superbrands, at global level. This is the new tool which we would like to put forward to brands in our market for the new edition of the Superbrands Romania Program. It is an innovative tool making high visibility possible worldwide for all brands whether global, or local. SBTV have proved practically immediate results being a simple and effective way to showcase a brand's achievements and

Superbrands status through a digital delivery platform, helping brands to quickly promote their brand values, current initiatives and social corporate responsibilities to consumers and key individuals.

Using this new tool, brands all over the world have discovered that SBTv provides a quick and practical platform to educate employees and staff about the interesting and unique story of the brand, as well as its latest products, developments, initiatives, and achievements, allowing brands to engage with consumers, via social media, and inform them about the history of the brand and its newly awarded 'Superbrands Status'. It is amazing how it worked abroad. So we hope to value it when promoting brands' performance in Romania, offering concrete examples of how brands around the world have used SBTv to reach market goals, increase business, and convince consumers to remain loyal. At the same time, they can share achievements with key audiences from senior management, shareholders, investors and major clients and suppliers, to journalists, researchers and academics and PR and advertising agencies.

What do you most want to highlight at Superbrands 2018?

As I said, we do need even more creative vision for this new edition. Looking around at other European markets, we are seeing so many Superbrands gala events at outstanding standards, taking place in many EU capitals, lately (the latest one in Lisbon on November 14). We have already received many questions from local brands about the start of the new edition. We've noticed significant interest in the independent research results, having in view the prestige of IPSOS, our traditional partner, and because of the international dimension of the program, allowing the sharing of experience with other markets. For sure this new edition will bring good news. We want our Superbrands to be happy because they make our life better and brighter.

What is the value added that the Superbrands project brings to the local market?

It is a fact that Superbrands of Romania brings value added to the sustained efforts made by the business community as a whole, in helping the economy consolidate and make

progress in a competitive market. High-performance brands help economic stability. At the same time, they confirm values and promote high quality standards, they build solid pillars for market development, they educate consumers, they influence our lifestyle, they offer models to follow. The Superbrands are invincible heroes, making the country move forward and communities prosper. They keep their promises in spite of the unfriendly business environment. Above all, they represent the strongest guarantee that Romania has a future, preserving Romania's reputation against all odds, at a time when the country needs, more than ever, recognition, respect and a good image in Europe and in other markets through showing its professional, creative and innovative force. I think that all

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those hundreds of brands getting the Superbrands status year by year represent Romania's true and most loyal friends, building our future, at home.

How would you describe the Romanian PR market now and how do you think it should be improved?

Generally speaking, the PR, PA and strategic communication consultancies have grown as a market in the last 20 years. Our industry has proved strong capabilities and it is absolutely undeniable that the creativity, strategic thinking and level of professional assistance are at least equal (if not better in many cases) to those of any highly reputed agency from abroad. Yet, growing the business in our field is highly influenced by economic development, by the profitability of companies as targeted clients, and by a stable legal and fis-

cal framework. Market stability and predictability are key factors feeding investors' trust and making them come and invest here. We depend to a large extent on such friendly market conditions which generate and increase demand for specialized services like ours. So, the market conditions are the first to be improved in order to make the communication industry stronger.

Is it similar to its CEE peers? What differentiates it from them?

I would say that Romania is the second largest strategic communication and PR market in the region, after Poland. Over the years, we have had many project opportunities in neighboring countries, either through the Hill+Knolwton Strategies network with which we have partnered since 2003, or teaming in key situations with other big consultancies in the WPP Group, or with regional public affairs networks.

We have also worked as an independent agency assisting our own clients with European or global representation in markets like Hungary, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic, but also in Ukraine. For the last 15 years, we have had significant representation in the Republic of Moldova, a small but interesting market, relevant mainly for projects funded by international donors like the EU, World Bank or USAID for institutional and economic development. Having said that, the clear perception is that Poland is the CEE leader in our field, being the preferred communication hub by global companies, in Central, Eastern and Southern Europe. I don't see any difference between Romania and these markets in terms of professionalism; yet, I always feel the touch of class when teaming with colleagues from company hubs or consultancies in Poland.

One other difference is the existence in these other markets of strong industry associations, with significant membership and history. This confers more force and consistent image capital on all agency members, hence many business benefits. We are trying to consolidate such good practices in Romania as well, under the auspices of the ARRP. One big step made forward by the ARRP was its affiliation to ICCO, as until recently Romania was the only country not part of this most highly reputed global organization in our field.