

## Bill Cella

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 Bill Cella's accomplishments in the media business-culminating in his current position as chairman/CEO of media buying powerhouse Magna Global Worldwide-were partly due to a pushy aunt. After graduating from college in 1973, a love of literature fueled the bearded English major's desire to pursue a career as a writer. But that wasn't very practical thinking in the middle of a recession. The push of practicality came from his aunt, who goaded Cella to submit himself for a sales job at WVOX radio in his hometown of New Rochelle, N.Y. Cella, who already knew the station's manager, landed a job "beating the bushes in Scarsdale and Larchmont," selling radio advertising to local retailers. "In those days the salesman did everything; sell time, write copy, collect bills," he remembers. WVOX would turn out to be the staging area for a meteoric rise through broadcasting, and eventually through the advertising side of the business, where he presides over a company that has more than \$32 billion in worldwide billings. After a stretch of time in radio, Cella's thoughts turned to television. He landed at Bolton Broadcasting in 1976, repping 10 UHF stations around the country, before moving to ABC, where he was in spot sales at WXYZ-TV in Detroit and then later in Chicago. He later returned to New York with ABC, where he sold network sports and primetime. Cella, who will be inducted into the Broadcasting & Cable Hall of Fame, was solidifying his reputation as a tough competitor and plain dealer, who could also charm both competitors and clients along the way. "He was phenomenal; honest, creative, hard-charging," says Joe Abruzzese, president of advertising sales at Discovery Communications, who vied for sales against Cella-and became his good friend-while at CBS. Although competitive, Cella was never without a handshake, win or lose, according to Abruzzese. "This is a very admirable business and people like Bill excel [in it]," he says. Dennis Swanson agrees. As then-president of ABC Sports, Swanson knew what he was getting when he tapped Cella to head up sales. "It was his intelligence-he knew how to price and negotiate deals," Swanson says. "But it was also his charisma, his personality and his charm." This was best exemplified, Swanson says, by their decision to broadcast the 1994 soccer World Cup without running any commercials while the game was being played. So they came up with the idea of branding the game clock by inserting a company's logo next to it. That had never been done before. "It was a novel concept," Swanson remembers. "But you had to have a Bill Cella to go out and sell the concept, to tell an advertiser there wouldn't be any in-game 30-second spots." "We did great things," Cella says of his two years heading sales at ABC Sports at a time when the market was economically challenged. "It was tough selling but we did a great job, both sales and programming. It was a matter of a whole group of people working together." Then John Dooner came calling. Dooner, at the time president of McCann Worldwide, knew the essence of Bill Cella perhaps longer than anyone else in the business; the two played opposite each other in Little League. "Like most second basemen," Dooner says, "he was scrappy, tough, competitive and determined. True then. True today." It took four months to woo Cella to the buying side of the table, but ultimately it was the challenge he could not turn down. "It was tough because I was in a comfort zone at ABC," Cella says, "and I had never worked at an agency. But it was probably one of the best moves I made." There was a comfort zone at McCann as well. Cella would be responsible for the Coca-Cola account, a client he knew. Cella says he learned most of what he knows about advertising from those years working with Coca-Cola executives Chuck Fruit and Scott McCune and other "astute and smart marketers," such as Johnson & Johnson and Nestle. Cella proved to be just as innovative a thinker on the buy side. During the 1996 Olympics, Coca-Cola struck the first-ever deal for non-alcoholic beverage exclusivity, essentially keeping its competitors out. It was this type of creative thinking that led to the birth of Magna Global, which concentrates on consolidated media buying on behalf of Interpublic Group's media companies and client-supplied programming. As sales organizations consolidated their assets, Cella says, it was important to protect their clients and level the playing field. "We would be at a disadvantage if we didn't use our clout," he says. Programming was a challenge, but again it was Cella's knack for getting the client to believe in the concept that made it all work. Sitting down with a handful of top clients, he told them of the plan to launch a programming arm and asked for their support. He got it. Since that time, Magna Global Entertainment programming has collected more than 30 awards, including six Emmy Awards. Among its titles are the acclaimed made-for-television movies *The Wool Cap*, *A Perfect Day* and *The Ron Clark Story*. Cella is also deeply involved in The Family Forum. With the power of 43 advertisers behind it, The Family Forum lobbies Hollywood for more family-oriented programming. The initiative, which Cella refers to as a "labor of love," has produced results such as *The Gilmore Girls*. "There are advertisers who are willing to buy into programming that is appropriate for families to watch," Cella says. "We were told initially that it wouldn't happen, but we actually pulled it off."

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To those who know Cella well, his success is no surprise. As Swanson puts it: "He gives a lot of himself."

-Jonathan Hemingway

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