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Direct-Response Business Looks for Shot in the Arm

Mercury brings in chief exec from diabetes supply company.

By JOEL RUSSELL

LOS ANGELES BUSINESS JOURNAL STAFF

Mercury Media, the largest private direct-response media buyer in the country, went outside the advertising industry to hire its new chief executive.

Ronald Pruett previously was chief marketing officer of Polymedica/Liberty Medical, a diabetes product supply company.

But it's not that big of a jump: The company was also a big buyer of direct-response TV time.

"It may look like a switch, but there is a natural segue," Pruett said. "At Liberty, the marketing was TV-centric. At Mercury, we are deep into direct-response TV and we are going to continue in that direction."

Pruett switched jobs after the publicly traded Polymedica was acquired by Medco Health Solutions.

Santa Monica-based Mercury already has some of the biggest clients in direct-response TV, including BodyFlex, Gold Vault, National Recreational Properties, Time Life Music, Ronco, Netflix and DirecTV.

Pruett said in the economic downturn that marketers who never considered direct marketing are now willing to try it because the link between media spending and sales can be precisely measured.

"The traditional customers are the gadget guys," he said. "But now a lot more corporations – and even electioneers – are looking at direct-response television. That opportunity is one of the reasons I joined Mercury."