



MICHAEL LEVENE

by Paul Marks

It is with great sadness that we have to announce that Michael Levene, one of the great stalwarts of our industry passed away on 29th December 2010 whilst on holiday in Mauritius with his children Aaron and Lucy. Michael had unfortunately suffered from poor health for the last few years.

Michael had effectively been in the Direct Response Industry for some 45 years having joined the demonstration business founded by his Father in the early 60's.

The business, William Levene Ltd, under Michael's guidance, became one of the top five Housewares distribution businesses in the UK. William Levene came to prominence through well known brands such as *MagiCan*, *Ken Hom*, *Culinare* and many more.

In the 80's Michael launched on TV the *MagiCan Can Opener*, which became a No 1 best seller in the millions, not only in the UK, but in several overseas markets.

To this day Magican, together with myriad housewares products retains a leading place in markets throughout the world.

In the 1970's Michael, via Arcade Records, ventured into the record album compilation business with William Levene. Along with Laurence Myers Michael built up TV driven marketing campaigns for compilation albums that changed the record industry forever.

Compilations such as Elvis' 40 Greatest, The Rolling Stones, Roy Orbison, Kenny Rogers and many more resulted in sales of more than 30 million albums. The Arcade business was then rolled out in Holland and Germany where more than 60 different compilations were created and marketed with huge success.

In the early 1990's Michael was joined by his long term friend and subsequent business partner Paul Marks as CEO, Best Direct was then created and launched into the Direct Response TV industry in 1991.

With a number of bold strategic moves, and within months of its launch, Best Direct became market leader in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Michael also spearheaded Best Direct's amazing success in the USA. Everybody in the industry will recall the huge numbers that *SafetyCan*, as just one example, generated.

A raft of successful products both "in house" and partner-developed were then launched. Enormous volumes were achieved with items such as *Rocket Chef*, *Wundermesser knives*, *Titanium II*, *Ken Hom Wok Set*, *Abflex*, *Total Gym* and many many more. Systems of control were developed that enabled overseas territories to be microscopically monitored and controlled from the UK.

Possibly the outstanding strategy was that all of this was achieved with UK-based personnel only.

In the late 90's as the UK market opened with the advent of satellite TV, Best Direct swiftly set up two infomercial channels broadcast on the Sky & Virgin Media platforms each holding prominent positions within the shopping category. Again with great success.

Best Direct played an instrumental part in the creation of the **British Television Shopping Association**, which subsequently merged with the **Electronic Retailing Association**.

This initiative was based on the Best Direct and William Levene ethos that was developed by Michael and Paul, the fundamental foundations being that relationships mattered, be them with Best Direct staff members, partners, product developers, inventors, suppliers and of course the consumer.

This ethos was built on integrity and honesty in Best Direct's and William Levenes' dealings, with everyone the companies employed or traded with.

Michael's great passion in business was focused around the product, his creative mind was always buzzing and his natural ability to spot a winner contributed to his great successes. His energy was always focused on creating and marketing something special.

That enthusiasm was infectious, as was his overall modus operandi.

Michael will be sorely missed, as one of the great pioneers of the international Direct Response industry by the many friends, colleagues, and business associates that he built over so many years.

John Mills, JML, ERA Europe Chairman

I have known Michael since the mid-1960s, and with a loyal and committed group of associates and staff he ran, at Best Direct, a highly successful business. He had a great deal of charm and was always a nice person to deal with – very straight and to the point. He was one of the real founding members of our type of business and he will be very sorely missed

Katie Williams, Sylmark

I was fortunate to know and do business with Michael for over 20 years. We shared lots of experiences in the often-daunting world of European DRTV—sometimes as competitors, sometimes as partners, but always with great friendship and deep respect for each other. Michael is one of the legends of our industry, a pioneer, an innovator, and a very savvy marketer. I learned a lot from him and consider him a very special person. My sympathies to Michael’s family and to his great team at Best Direct/Industex.

Richard Whinfrey, The Maverick Consultancy

I first met Michael Levene in the bar of a hotel in Sydney Australia in the mid 70s and our paths have crossed many times since then. To me, Michael was always an outgoing person who enjoyed the finer things in life. Dinner with Michael was a combination of fine dining and excellent conversation. On the business front Michael was hugely knowledgeable and thoroughly professional. Negotiating a contract with him could be a gruelling experience but you knew that once the contract was signed Michael would do everything in his power to meet his side of the deal. I will miss his warm welcomes, his friendship and his wise counsel. He is a great loss to our industry.

Charitable donations in Michael’s name can be made at www.justgiving.com/michael-levene



Electronic Retailing Association