

Learfield to use college ties to boost ANC business

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Editor's note: *This story is revised from the print edition.*

ANC Sports Enterprises puts the signage into stadiums and arenas. Collegiate marketing firm Learfield Sports sells it. It only makes sense that the two companies would go into business together.

In a deal consummated last week, Learfield acquired controlling interest in Purchase, N.Y.-based ANC, whose technology has been used in LED courtside signage, ribbon boards, video screens and other in-venue displays for nearly 20 years. While ANC has deep roots and relationships in professional sports, especially Major League Baseball, Learfield intends to pave the way for ANC to establish a deeper base of business in the college ranks.

"ANC has done a lot of big deals, but they don't have the depth of relationships in the college space. That's where we think we can help," Learfield CEO Greg Brown said.

ANC, a company of 75 full-time employees, has been around since 1997 when Jerry Cifarelli and Alan Cohen started the business. The company has evolved into what Cifarelli described as a turnkey operation, beginning with the display design through installation, operation and service of the boards. Cifarelli along the way became considered something of a pioneer in the field of in-venue signage.

The company has deals with 14 MLB teams and more than two dozen clients across the NFL, NBA and NHL. ANC's emerging non-sports business is beginning to take off as well, Cifarelli said.

In the college space, ANC's clients among schools that also work with Learfield include Boise State, Louisville, Missouri, Penn State, Temple, Wyoming and Xavier. ANC's business with those schools ranges from all sorts of LED signage to operation, software and content creation for the displays. In this new arrangement, Learfield will make introductions for ANC to its college partners, providing ANC more opportunities to compete for business.

"We tend to hear about projects like [video displays] when they're in their formative stages, when schools are just starting to think about it," Brown said. "We can hopefully provide schools with ideas as they look to modify their arenas. If we can get in earlier and provide the introductions, that can be helpful in the formative stages of a project. ... This is a big piece of the fan engagement, fan experience, initiative that we're seeing all over the country and it's not going to go away."

The acquisition accomplishes two major goals for Learfield. It enables the company, which has 90 college partners, to expand its offerings to the schools while positioning ANC to pick up more college business and increase its revenue. Financial details for the company were not revealed, but Cifarelli described 2014 as ANC's second-best year since it was founded, and it's been on a steady revenue growth path over the years.

Like many of Learfield's other acquisitions, this one was born out of Brown's deep relationships in the collegiate marketplace. Brown and Cifarelli have been crossing paths in the sports industry for close to 20 years.

"A lot of people maybe don't know us as well as they should," Cifarelli said. "To have the phone ring one day and a company like Learfield expressing an interest like they have, it's really the start of something very dynamic. Learfield is in a very aggressive growth mode and we couldn't be happier to work with them on showing universities what we can do."

Cifarelli will continue to lead ANC, which will maintain its name. The ANC management team will report to Learfield COO Marc Jenkins.

Learfield's acquisitions in the past year include multimedia rights holder Nelligan Sports, digital business Sidearm Sports, and a pair of licensing agencies that it merged into Learfield Licensing Partners.