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CASE STUDY

10/29/2003

## When a Failing Company Hires You as Chief Marketing Officer -- Inspirational Turnaround Story

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**CHALLENGE:** There is a certain glamour and excitement, mixed with an oh-my-god-can-I-pull-this-off? feeling, to being brought into a failing company as the new Chief Marketing Officer.

18 months ago, Chris Coleman accepted the challenge. In 1986, she founded the first tech marketing agency in the Southeast, in 2000 she wrote the book, 'The Green Banana Papers: Marketing Secrets for Technology Entrepreneurs.' Now she had to put her work where her mouth was...

Although the Company, SecureWorks, had a great business software product in the "five-figure price range," they had almost no qualified sales leads in the pipeline. Plus, they were a barely-known brand in an incredibly competitive niche.

"This was a classic opportunity to do what when you're on the agency side you spend time trying to convince clients to do," says Coleman.

**CAMPAIGN:** First Coleman and her team studied the marketplace and broke it into four key niches based on how prospects identified themselves -- banks, credit unions, utilities, and healthcare organizations.

Why not just market to IT titles across industries and ignore the organization type?

Coleman knew that the final decision-maker would be a management-level executive, and "they all know each other and all talk to each other in our target markets. They refer to each other very closely even when they're in competition." So, by focusing vertically by industry rather horizontally by job title she could maximize the old-boy network more effectively.

And why not lump banks and credit unions together?

Turns out that while their security software needs might be

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identical, they thought of themselves as being in very different worlds. Talking to them as one group annoys prospects on both sides. "It's like calling you by the wrong first name. You won't like me even if I'm saying something that's useful to you."

Next Coleman researched every single national and regional association and membership organization for each niche. There were far more than you might think. And, each had their own lists, publications, and events that she hoped SecureWorks could take advantage of.

"All our prospects belonged to an association. The feeling was, we're going to be the most helpful, the most visible vendor they've ever invited as an affiliate member."

She adds, "It's like any other organization. Only 10% of members do the work and the others show up to get their picture in the yearbook." SecureWorks execs began to be the volunteers that every committee-head dreams of recruiting.

With these pieces in place, Coleman set her outbound marketing strategy for the next 12 months.

"I decided to keep it very simple. We would do three things and do them very, very well. And we're not quitting until we've done them for a year. At the end of the year I would take measurements. If we invested more in any tactic than we got back, we'd scale it back."

Why invest in a tactic for a whole year before pruning? "I insisted on a year because you have no idea what's a trend and what's a pothole and what's just an aberration in a shorter period."

-> Tactic #1. Revamping the Web site for response

Coleman completely trashed the old SecureWorks' site look and feel. "There was a lot of initial concern on the part of the tech staff and analysts who felt the Web site was their property."

To overcome internal resistance she held a meeting with each department prior to giving the Web design firm directions. "We asked for requirements, but made it very clear we weren't asking for creative help or site managing help."

Then, she gave the Web design firm three specific goals:

a. Each niche marketplace must be able to find themselves on the home page, and with one-click, get information specifically created in their wording-style, referring to their needs. (Plus, as soon as possible, happy customer quotes from their peers.)

b. The look and colors of the site must not be too similar to competitors' sites. If prospects surfed several sites at once (which frequently happens in every industry), the SecureWorks site must leap out from the crowd. This meant no clip-art photos and pretty much eliminating somber 'businessy' colors such as blue.

c. Every page should have calls to action, including contact information and one-click links to prospect forms.

Also, initially Coleman had asked the design team to obey the classic "no scrolling" rule, and to keep the home page as simple as possible.

After a few months of tracking studies and clickthrough analysis, Coleman began to wonder if the classic rule was incorrect. Perhaps a longer, more copy-heavy home page might work better. So, she asked the design team to launch a test. (Link to screenshots of simple vs denser home pages below.)

-> Tactic #2. Speaking gigs at association events

If you handle them right, speaking gigs can help you educate the marketplace; establish your company's credibility as leading experts; garner sales leads; and, garner ink in association mailers and publications.

Coleman's team created a series of at least five informative speech topics for each of the niche industries. These were posted on the site (link to screenshot below) and pitched to event committee leaders.

"The point of the topics was to prove that if you call us to talk at one of your events, or for a story, you're not going to get a sales pitch."

Once they landed a gig, Coleman gave SecureWorks execs four rules for speeches:

a. Don't rely heavily on your Powerpoint slides (if you just read what's on the screen it's a huge yawn.) "It's not a crutch."

b. Always speak for less time than the organizers give you so there's more time for questions and audience interaction.

c. It's ok to re-use a standard speech, as long as you insert fresh anecdotes and tweak the contents to the niche of the audience. Also, you need about five "standards" in your pocket so no one who attends several events hears you give the same speech over and over again.

d. Ask for business cards. In fact Coleman assigns a business card quota for each speech. "Some of our speakers even get off the podium and walk in the crowd asking for cards." Offer something specific in exchange, such as a white paper related to the niche field.

-> Tactic #3. Direct response mailers to association lists

Coleman believes very strongly in the power of the repeated touch. She says it's not good enough to send a campaign to a prospect once, you have to touch them in some way, shape, or form at least once a month to get them to remember you and finally convert into a lead.

Some of the touches could be speeches and resulting association publication coverage, others could be SecureWorks email newsletter. Coleman also scheduled direct response mailers to be sent on a regular basis throughout the year.

The marketing team tested a #10 closed-face, personalized package (link to sample below.) Coleman tossed every single trick she'd learned from a lifetime of campaigns into making this standard business-sized format work, including:

- o Using bright yellow envelopes instead of white ones so the package stood out from regular mail.
- o A handwritten (printed) post-it note on the outside envelope (yes, their fulfillment house has a way to make this stay on.)
- o Live postal stamps (instead of indicia)
- o A personally signed letter inside (really truly hand signed, not just faux printed signature)
- o A fun premium -- the New Yorker Book of Business Cartoons -- for everyone who responded to a list of lead qualification questions.
- o Many response channel options -- email, fax, Web, business reply envelope

Normally a campaign like this would cost big bucks, so to keep pricing down, Coleman's team only used the most targeted lists and did as much of the production work in-house as possible. This was definitely a hand-crafted campaign.

The team also tested colorful self-mailers such as oversized four-panel, fold-over postcards. "You can order full-color cards online for very little money. The beauty is that somebody has to see something on it before they toss it into the trash. It makes an impression on them, even if it's only subliminal, even if it's only the logo."

Coleman adds, "Also, postcards make life easy for the creative director and marketing director."

Since a prospect may only glance at a postcard for a second before consigning it to the trash, Coleman wanted to stand out as much as possible. SecureWorks' software stops bugs, so her creative team came up with a series of pictures of real-world bugs.

"There was one with close-ups of cockroaches - it was very gross. Another one had worms."

RESULTS: SecureWorks now has a wealth of qualified sales leads...

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... in the pipeline that its competitors would be jealous of, plus currently 6% of leads close. The average sales cycle has been reduced to just under a month, and closing is done entirely over the phone and email. The Company was also recently won a CIO magazine 100 Award.

More results:

- The denser, longer home page works far better than the simple

one. "I have taken a lot of flack internally from sales on this page," notes Coleman. "They say, 'This page is way too crowded, there's too much going on here.'" Coleman looks at her metrics reports, crosses her arms, and stands firm.

At first she couldn't figure out why the longer page worked better. Then one evening when shopping for some pearls for herself online, she figured it out.

If you are planning to spend a significant amount of money - an investment spend - you'll either go with the most famous brand (such as Tiffany's, whose home page is very simple) or you'll want to know everything possible to feel secure about your decision, so you'll go with the most educational site, such as AmericanPearl.com.

"They have to educate people very, very quickly. They're not selling essence and brand. They're selling 'how smart can I get this person quickly so they'll think of me as their expert source and come back when they are ready to spend money on an investment.'

"When you are evaluating a big purchase, you want more information. The more information you can get without clicking, the better."

- The speaking gig campaign is going so well that SecureWorks execs have already been booked as keynote speakers for four major association conferences for 2004. Plus, some conferences now offer SecureWorks a stipend to cover speaker travel costs. That would never happen if they thought the speaker was going to use the occasion as a platform for a sales pitch.

- The #10 package was the clear winner of tests. "They couldn't have been more effective," says Coleman.

- Self mailers did poorly. Coleman chastises herself for relying on a creative concept instead of specific offer copy. "Cutesy and conceptual does \*not\* work. Don't use conceptual graphics or headlines requiring the viewer to make a metaphorical leap from looking at the concept to what you're actually selling."

She adds, "Agencies have a terrible difficulty with this. They are not true to themselves if they don't produce very creative concepts. But it's not about the creative work, it has nothing to do with the work. When you accept the client's business, it's all about the prospect, the client's buyer.

An example, "I may not be wild about Arial black font for a home page headline from an aesthetic point of view, but it works best for us." All that matters as a marketer is what works -- you can please your aesthetics on your own personal home page afterhours.

While Coleman is pleased by SecureWorks' success, she doesn't brag about it much. "It's the beauty of coming in when things couldn't get any worse." It's a great opportunity to be a marketing hero.

Useful links related to this article:

Samples of home pages tests, the winning #10 DM package and SecureWorks' email newsletter:

Spunlogic, the agency that created SecureWorks new Web site and much of SecureWorks' successful DM creative: <http://www.spunlogic.com>

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