

Company strategy: Get results

Strata-G Communications focuses on clients' return on investment

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A clever advertising campaign is all well and good, but if the client doesn't make more money because of it, what's funny about that?

At Strata-G Communications, the owners and employees like to create fun work and win industry awards, just as much as the next agency, but it's not what they consider most important. Instead, the downtown-based integrated marketing company puts its top priority on helping clients get a better return on investment for their marketing dollar.

When you get right down to it, said co-owner Tony Magliano, it's a simple equation. "If I give you a dollar, are you gonna give me two back? Three?"

In Strata-G's 10-year history, he and co-owner Jeff Eberlein have always tried to keep this basic question in mind as they create everything from corporate identity campaigns to direct marketing pieces to interactive and Web-based programs. As the focus on ROI has grown over the years, so has the push to delve deeply into clients' goals and culture; to quantify the impact of every campaign; and to create all manner of customized technology pieces to help drive sales.

Bottom line, said Eberlein: Every staff member has to be a great business thinker. It's no longer enough for the creative

team, for example, to just be creative.

The strategy has worked well enough to provide the steady, sustainable growth that Eberlein and Magliano favor. Former co-workers at another local agency, they started Strata-G in 1996. From 14 employees in its first year, the company has grown to 45.

Sargent and Greenleaf chose Strata-G as agency of record, said Phil Pitt, marketing director for the Nicholasville, Ky.-based provider of high-security locks and locking systems for sales and vaults.

The lock company has definitely enjoyed a healthy ROI from Strata-G's work for its A Series product, which is a locking system for the safes inside ATMs, said Pitt. A direct mail campaign introduced the product to the top 150 banks in the country; it

also led potential clients to an online cost-calculator created by Strata-G that allowed them to input real bank information in a variety of categories to see the cost savings they could realize from buying the product.

"It opened doors at several major banks in the United States, landed us some

business immediately and set the stage for future sales," Pitt said.

Strata-G's ROI push has taken it naturally into working with clients' sales forces, an area that isn't necessarily addressed by typical advertising and marketing agencies but is critical, said Eberlein. Companies often fail to connect the dots between their sales force and their marketing efforts, he said, and can even have an adversarial relationship between the two areas.

Over the past few years, the agency has been spending more time helping clients put those two forces in sync, and more clients have hired it to create sales tools. For outdoor power equipment manufacturer Husqvarna, for example, the agency is writing the sales force's scripts and creating the PowerPoint archive of sales information.

For power tool maker Bosch, Strata-G is learning so much about a new product that it's creating the FAQ sheet that the Bosch sales staff uses to answer questions.

And for Cincinnati-based hotel management company Wingardner & Hammons Inc., Strata-G has created Web-based sales tools for the sales and revenue management areas, said Cindy Swift, national sales director of business development.

The agency worked for several years

to understand WHI's sales challenges and develop the system, she said. She called the system cutting-edge enough to give the company an edge over competitors, helping it to strategize with its hotels, make pricing decisions and drive sales.

"It allows us to get this data more consistently and more timely and helps us with forming our sales strategies," Swift said.

The beauty of the WHI sales portal, said Magliano, is that the concept can be applied fairly easily to many types of potential clients, especially in the hotel industry, which is an area that Strata-G plans to explore more. About 60 percent of the agency's business is in its two core areas of concentration — financial services, and building and home improvement products — but it is always looking to make sure its stable of clients is well-rounded.

As for the future, Eberlein sees continued growth in the public relations division and more client demand for projects that use technology to drive sales and collect information.

But the belief that client ROI trumps all won't change.

As Pitt of Sargent and Greenleaf, observed: "No. 1 for them is to understand clients' objectives and goals. Once they do, then they apply the creative."



Magliano



Eberlein