

Full Service B2B Marketing and Communications for Life Science, High Tech, Software and Healthcare Companies



Debra Harrsch
President & CEO
Brandwidth Solutions LLC

CEOCFO: Ms. Harrsch, what is the idea behind Brandwidth Solutions?

Ms. Harrsch: The idea behind Brandwidth Solutions came from my working as a director of marketing. In that role, I felt that the ad agencies in the science and healthcare space did not really understand the customer, because they had not sold to the customer. Brandwidth Solutions' mission is to be an agency that thinks like a marketer, understands all the marketing communications tools and how to implement and measure them, and executes like a sales person. We work with clients by delivering best-in-class teams with strategies and solutions that fit their needs and objectives.

CEOCFO: What are some examples of how your marketing approach is different?

Ms. Harrsch: When we work with a client, we do a discovery session with them to understand what they do, who they are, and who their market is. As we start working with them, we look at the tools that are available to marketing communications professionals, from the traditional collateral, PR, and advertising to the digital, social media, and e-marketing. We understand what their budget is, we define who their target audience is, and we define what their goals are, and then we develop a plan to reach their goals and objectives. We also determine how to measure and can course-correct as appropriate. All of this is done as though we are a marketer within our client's company – meaning we're accountable. There are some firms that look at marketing from their vantage point, what we are experts in, and they drive the conversation that way. That is not how we work.

CEOCFO: Are clients coming to you because they know the difference in your approach or are they often surprised?

Ms., Harrsch: I think clients come to us because they know we know their market. We understand life science, pharma and healthcare. We also play in the energy space. Based on our reputation and the things we have done, they see that we really know and understand their customers. They do not have to do as much training with us as they do with some firms. We know how to talk to scientists. We're familiar with their industries, technologies. And it shows in our work. I think that industry expertise is one of the reasons they come to us. The reason they stay with us is because we deliver results.

CEOCFO: How did the energy come about?

Ms. Harrsch: We started serving the energy sector through a former colleague. I had been working as marketing director for the informatics division of Thermo Fisher Scientific, and our general manager left to become CEO for an energy company. I was starting Brandwidth Solutions at the same time she needed a marketing agency. Energy Solutions was providing software for the oil and gas industry and my former boss hired Brandwidth because she knew we understood software and could learn that market. That is how we got into the energy space, through software. Then it was quick leap to Linde and others.

CEOCFO: Are you looking for a particular mix or is it as they come?

Ms. Harrsch: It is interesting because the client mix changes; sometimes we have more energy, sometimes we have more life science and sometimes we have more healthcare. We work with large corporations, within their brand guidelines, and with startups where we're creating their brand. We're looking to keep our work interesting and fresh through a mix of clients, and we have great clients. Quite a few clients come to us by referral -- they have seen our work, or sometimes marketers move and they take us with them. We are fortunate to keep many clients year after year because we deliver results and look for innovative solutions to deliver those results.

CEOCFO: *How do you mesh all of the parts of what you are doing? When might gut feeling override statistics take?*

Ms. Harrsch: We start with a discovery session for everything we do. This enables us to understand what a client has done in the past, how it has worked, and what their goals and objectives are. Then we are able to develop a strategy and plan. We have been doing quite a bit of social media for clients. For most of our clients, we do everything their content, posts on all of their appropriate social media channels, and measurement. We do a very deep dive as part of the discovery session. We want to understand the voice of the company, how they think, what they have done in the past, what is working, and who is the target audience. We look to see what will work for that client. For healthcare clients, we also need to take into account the FDA guidelines and be in compliance. Once you get all of that information, then you can allow your gut to know if something is going to work or not. Sometimes clients have a very distinct path they want to take and, oftentimes, in our conversations they will insist on a path even though we feel that a different path might be slightly better. We will start down their path and often they will say that they understand what we were thinking. I think data is important. I have no problem with gut decisions as long as they're based on facts. The gut part comes as part of years of experience in these B-to-B markets.

CEOCFO: *Do you need to keep up with all the regulatory items?*

Ms. Harrsch: You do need to keep up. The variety of industries and types of companies we serve means a variety of regulatory requirements to be aware of. For instance, the FDA took a while to come out with their social media guidelines. They had issued a draft directive and from that directive, it took two years to finalize the guidelines. Also, some requirements are country based and we have clients all over the world. Healthcare is the one with the most regulated. I sit on the executive board of the Diagnostic Marketing Association, the DxMA. In that position, I have the opportunity to stay abreast of healthcare's changing environment. Every year we have a global summit where industry leaders, including the FDA, discuss the upcoming and current regulations. Staying up to date is part of our jobs. It insures that we are developing the correct programs and plans for our clients.

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CEOCFO: *How do you present the required information without scaring people?*

Ms. Harrsch: Our market segment is B-to-B, so we do not have the kind of disclaimers that you would see on TV advertising for prescription or OTC drugs, for instance. Our clients are selling to pharma, hospitals or physicians, dentists, and veterinarians, so in that world we do not have the need for that type of disclaimer.

CEOCFO: *Are there types of projects you prefer to work on, given a choice?*

Ms. Harrsch: Many times our clients come to us for full service solutions. Sometimes they have specific projects. For some of our full service clients we can be their marketing department or their marketing communications department and for others, we are an extra pair of hands. It does not matter to me what kind of engagement it is – I love them all. We do like to work on projects where we are part of the client's team. This enables us to better understand what is happening on their projects, company culture, and voice so we are more effective. When we talk to clients, it is not "you," it is "our," because we feel very much part of their team. It is really their success that we aspire to. We do a lot with monitoring and providing analytics to show them if what they are doing is working or if we need to take a different task or course. At the end of the day, it is about their success and always about getting to the end goal.

CEOCFO: *How do you get the attention of doctors?*

Ms. Harrsch: I think when you market to physicians, it is important to find whatever that pain point is that they need to solve to make their job easier and move them forward quicker or help their patients. At the end of the day, doctors really care about the health of their patients. They have a lot of rules to follow and guidelines to deal with. When you speak to doctors, it is important that you deliver the value proposition that relates to their major pain point. I really think that no matter what material or format you present, whether it is social media, digital, print advertising, or collateral, if you cannot deliver what the value of a product or service is in the first paragraph, then you have missed an opportunity. People do not have time to read that much, they are bombarded with information from every side. If you can deliver that value very early on, you will be able to get their attention. That principal is less is more.

CEOCFO: *Are there certain methods you know work and yet people are still reluctant?*

Ms. Harrsch: Social media. For the most part, with B-to-B clients, a lot of their interface with social media is at the consumer level. Many do not understand how it could work for them. I see three types of clients. We have some clients that want to be in everything and have to do everything right away; we have other clients that do not think social media

works and that their customers aren't there, and the last client is one that is afraid of it. I understand all three of those points of view. In our view, you have to make a plan; you have to be strategic and precise because you only get one shot at it. When information gets out in the cyber world, you cannot take it back. I once had someone say that they are going to hire an attorney to get something off the web. You really cannot do that. Once it is out there, it is out there. I think the expression "Failing to plan is planning to fail" is very true, especially in the social media world. However, in everything you do, if you make a good solid plan and develop measurement goals you can get results. And, of course, you can shift if you find the messaging doesn't resonate. Social media allows you monitor and determine what messaging works what conversations are being shared. Then you know what your audience is listening to and what is important to them. This information can help in your other forms of marketing communications. This allows you to really engage with your audience.

To bring reluctant clients into social media, we show them an infographic of all the channels they can participate in – often they say, "I didn't realize this." Our social media services include a 60-day research project to learn about audience, competitors' and customers' use of social media, etc. Clients get a full report and recommendations. From there, we develop a strategic plan and monitor their custom program monthly, with comprehensive quarterly reports. This ongoing measurement lets us course-correct when necessary and ensure we continue to meet their objectives. We plan for the next year based on what is working.

This type of program and planning enables you to chat with them on how to use social media; it is an entirely different conversation. We recently had a customer say they were thinking of being on Twitter and I asked if that was the only channel they were thinking of using. Their answer was to start with Twitter and see where it goes. I asked what they were going to base their tweets on, what were they going to drive their audience to? In the course of a 30-minute conversation, they said, "We really did not think that through very well, did we?" It was not because they did not want to think it through very well; they did not understand that they could be more powerful and that their social media could have more bite and provide more engaged opportunity with their customers while providing more information for their customers. People use social media to learn. I was recently at a meeting with a life science company and they indicated that people had decided on their product even before speaking with their sales people. The reason they were able to do that was because they went on social media and figured it out. They go on your website and then they start doing homework. They do homework in the LinkedIn groups, using Twitter feeds and Google Plus. People are researching way before they finally contact you, so if you are not part of that conversation you are losing opportunities.

CEOCFO: *What terms would a company search for to find Brandwidth-you have such a broad offering?*

Ms. Harrsch: We are specific to B-to-B, so terms should include B-to-B marketing and branding for our target markets of life science, high tech, software, pharma and healthcare, as well as energy. We get referred a great deal by other people. Even publications refer Brandwidth Solutions because they see what we do for their clients. Many people also know us because I sit on the DxMA board of directors, but also because we go to trade shows that are industry specific. We also get many people coming to us through our website.

CEOCFO: *What has changed in your approach over time that allows Brandwidth Solutions to be better today?*

Ms. Harrsch: We started out with the idea of providing customers with solutions to their problems and building teams around them. One of the things that we learned is that many people in marketing today did not come up through sales. Some have come from product management, so they do not have a great deal of marketing experience. Therefore, one of the things that we have learned is that we have to do a great deal of education for our customers. We are also putting together training modules on social media, creative briefs, and advertising planning for those clients that didn't come through sales or have had very little marketing experience. Even younger people, while they understand social media, do not understand how it fits in with all of the marketing pieces and how to use everything in a company and integrate it. We always know that we needed to integrate marketing, but we did not realize that many companies did not understand the best ways to do integration. Therefore, they are missing some skills, and we are in the process of teaching as we go through their marketing and communications plan.

CEOCFO: *Put it all together for our readers. Why choose Brandwidth Solutions?*

Ms. Harrsch: People choose Brandwidth Solutions because we understand their market, we believe in making a good solid plan, and we know how to deliver results. Then, as we monitor, we course correct as we go. Therefore, people are not stuck with something that is not working. It is really important to do your homework before you venture into any kind of marketing and we deliver results to customers.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine



Brandwidth Solutions LLC

For more information visit:
www.brandwidthsolutions.com

Contact:
Debra Harrsch
215 997 8575
mkt@brandwidthsolutions.com