

Streamlined, Mobile Event Planning Platform



Len Gauger
Founder & CEO

About Message Blocks

Message Blocks is the extra digital team member that keeps information together and connects the dots. The Ann Arbor-based company has been changing the way people plan events since 2012.

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

CEOCFO: Mr. Gauger, would you tell us the concept at Message Blocks?

Mr. Gauger: Message Blocks serves as that extra digital team member to conference planning teams. We are the central location for all information, helping them teams organize and execute to provide a better experience for both themselves and attendees.

CEOCFO: Many companies are involved in your space; what is it that you understand about events and the process that allows you to have a superior offering?

Mr. Gauger: As a former conference planner in DC, I started Message Blocks with the vision of improving the way people plan events. Many of our competitors only focus on ticket sales or registration or event applications. We focus on bringing the team together and allowing the team to communicate, specifically focusing on the way events are coordinated and planned.

CEOCFO: What are some of the common areas where people that are planning events fall short?

Mr. Gauger: I would say that 95% of the actual work that goes into events happens before the day of the event. Success relies on how people communicate in different ways on different topics, which tends to be error-prone. What ends up happening is that many professional conference centers still use physical binders. That works well for some, but at the end of the day, they need to make sure that the message in their binder is consistent across the entire planning team, suppliers, and anyone they interact with in that process. That is where things tend to fall by the wayside, within that communication among team members, the venue, and the other people involved.

CEOCFO: Who typically is turning to you and what point in time?

Mr. Gauger: Our goal is to get in communication with planning teams before they have their first kickoff. Message Blocks takes a different look at the planning and organization of events. We start at the moment that idea comes about. We have our digital binder system that allows them to communicate and collaborate. Many conference planners are maybe off doing a site inspection and have all these events and information going on that trying to plan kickoffs and meetings can be difficult. Therefore, they come to us.

CEOCFO: Are the people you should be reaching aware of Message Blocks?

Mr. Gauger: We are a new company, having been around for about two years now, but word travels fast. When we were first starting up, we were lucky to have some great evangelists like Habitat for Humanity and TEDxDetroit. We are now on our third year with Habitat for Humanity as well as many other Michigan companies. We also work with some association management companies in Chicago. Having those organizations continue to use us has really helped us grow.

CEOCFO: What has changed from your original concept? What have you learned?

Mr. Gauger: One thing that we have learned is that it is important to ask the right questions. We interview a lot of customers and prospective customers. It is not just about getting answers but more about learning and

understanding their needs and behaviors. At the end of the day, they need something that makes their lives easier, brings their team together, and streamlines their workflow. As a result, we have moved from being just an online event agenda to that central location for planning team members to come together and see all the same information in the same place at the same time.

CEO CFO: *Are you making suggestions along the way or are you more of a blank canvas where the planners can put in their information and make their own decisions?*

Mr. Gauger: We have certain features already in place, but event planners look at events as all being different. When I was a professional conference planner and just starting out, I would ask how we planned our events, but every event is different. With Message Blocks, they can use as much or as little as they want. They can plan with their own process instead of learning ours.

CEO CFO: *Are you providing the format to just communicate?*

Mr. Gauger: With any application, we allow them to use it in whichever way works best for them. That greatly reduces the learning curve for them, allowing them to interact naturally and give us suggestions on the way that they plan. We have plans to introduce recommendations, reviews, and ideas from other planners, which we have already started to build.

“It is about the team. It is about the ability to communicate. It is about the reduction of task time. That is what makes a great event.” - Len Gauger

CEO CFO: *Message Blocks sets metrics and run records and you are able to manage many features through your sites. Are your customers going beyond the planning phase?*

Mr. Gauger: Yes, they are. That is one of the things people have been asking us. They want to know what happens to their information after the event is over and what happens next year when they are looking at facilities. They can go into their Message Blocks account to check their archives and have all that information.

CEO CFO: *When you are speaking with a prospective client, is there an aha moment?*

Mr. Gauger: When I first started Message Blocks, I would sit down and talk to people that maybe did not plan events but were consultants. The aha moment for me is when I sit down with these planners and two minutes in, they are clicking around and trying things out. They are using the app and they understand it because it is built from their perspective as a planner.

CEO CFO: *How are you reaching out to planners to let them know you exist?*

Mr. Gauger: We utilize social media and a lot of networking events. We are continuing to reach out to people. I am lucky to have an extremely passionate team that wants to thrive and help whomever they can. Our current customers are also telling other people.

CEO CFO: *Are there particular industries or size of events where people are more likely to turn to you?*

Mr. Gauger: The majority of our incoming clients are currently association members. Our customers typically plan ten to fifty events a year. They may have about three larger conferences but they have other conferences and workshops throughout the year. These planning teams are typically three people or more and have around one to three million dollars in transactions annually.

CEO CFO: *What is your revenue model?*

Mr. Gauger: Our revenue model is subscription-based, so organizations can either pay monthly or annually upfront for unlimited team members, unlimited events, and unlimited data. In addition, we have a transaction fee for registrations.

CEO CFO: *Your site indicates that you are the first mobile platform for event planning. How is that so?*

Mr. Gauger: From the beginning to the end of an event, you can access our entire platform, not just registration and email, on a mobile device.

CEO CFO: *What were the challenges technologically to allow all this to happen smoothly?*

Mr. Gauger: We are in a constant balancing act on a roller coaster. For us, our challenges have been finding and choosing the right team members, identifying the correct way to put things together, and raising the funds needed to attract the right talent.

CEOCFO: *Do you have funding for future growth?*

Mr. Gauger: Yes, we recently received our first city investment. Moving forward, we are looking at upstate and institutional investment.

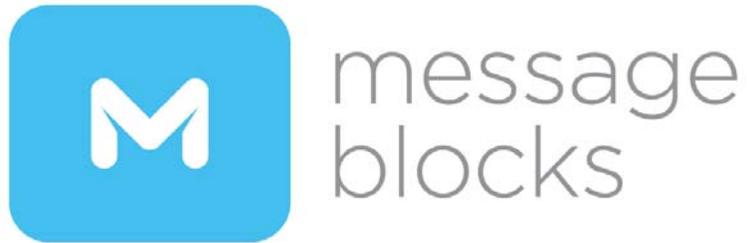
CEOCFO: *Why are you looking now as opposed continuing to bootstrap?*

Mr. Gauger: We are preparing ourselves for that hockey stick growth. In addition to our continuing work in Michigan, we recently brought on our first regional sales director out in Washington D.C. We are also expanding our reach into Chicago, developing and educating people as we move towards a national presence.

CEOCFO: *Why pay attention to Message Blocks today and what might people miss about the product that they should understand?*

Mr. Gauger: It is about the team. It is about the ability to communicate. It is about the reduction of task time. That is what makes a great event. For example, with our speaker integration, instead of a speaker sending a bio or other information to the planner who then has to upload it, the speaker gets an invitation from the planner to upload his information and slides directly. Message Blocks is about the incremental time savings everywhere.

BIO: Len Gauger is the Founder & CEO of Message Blocks. After previously working as a professional conference planner in DC, he moved back to his home state of Michigan to start Message Blocks. When not immersed in growing the team and defining the vision of the company he spends his time with his wife and their daughter.



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