

## Full-Service Strategic Communications



**Barbara Wichmann- CEO**

Headquartered in San Francisco, at the intellectual heart of Silicon Valley, ARTÉMIA is a full-service strategic communications agency specializing in the utility, clean tech and sustainability, healthcare/healthcare IT, high tech, financial and government industries. With a focus on diversity and sustainability and expertise across all aspects of the communications and marketing spectrum, from social media content development and management, integrated marketing and media buying to lead generation and events, ARTÉMIA keeps Fortune 100/500 and emerging technology companies positioned for success.

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

**CEOCFO: Ms. Wichmann, what was the vision when ARTÉMIA Communications started? Where are you today?**

**Ms. Wichmann:** Initially, nineteen years ago, we started out as an international product launch company. We would introduce US firms into the European market, the Canadian market and so on. It was heavily focused in those days on our core communications and public relations services.

What we learned quickly as we worked with clients on many successful product launches, was that there were more ways we could help to better position the client, and help them to really maximize their traction. Therefore, we transitioned into becoming a 'full-service' agency, and went from being solely focused on PR to integrated communications. Today, content creation and brand messaging is at the heart of what we do. We are laser focused on helping our clients reach their target audience in the most efficient way, be that via integrated marketing and advertising campaigns, public outreach and events, or shaping a new brand identity.

**CEOCFO: Who is your typical client today? Is there such an entity?**

**Ms. Wichmann:** To some extent there is. We generally operate in the utilities, healthcare IT, government and financial services market sectors. We have two main client 'groups'. We work with really high growth, emerging technology companies. As you can imagine, based in San Francisco we are surrounded by many innovative startups who can be really exciting to work with. We also work with many Fortune 500/100 companies across the US, many of whom are global enterprises. I really enjoy the contrast of these two groups, the different challenges they bring and the ways in which each can learn from the other.

**CEOCFO: What is the key to understanding what your client needs, not just what they think they need or want?**

**Ms. Wichmann:** First you listen to what the client says they really need; what they perceive as their need. Then it is really about an assessment; a strategic evaluation of the information that you received, combined with our own in-depth market research. In our case, we always do detailed competitive analysis, whether the client asks for it or not. We feel it is a key element in our on-boarding process. It gives us a better handle to really see, objectively, what needs to happen and to fill any gaps between what the client might perceive as their immediate need and what we think the industry really requires.

We address everything we do with a strategic mindset. Through our conversation, research and assessment process, we tease out the proposed solutions and customize them to our clients needs. We also believe in the value of a collaborative approach. We feel that our clients are the experts in their own industry and we in ours. Being transparent in our process of strategy and planning helps the client commit to the proposals we make. There is really an exchange of information and they understand why we recommend certain strategic moves and tactical moves as well.

**CEOCFO: How do you reach potential clients? How do they find you?**

**Ms. Wichmann:** We have been very blessed, I have to say as a large part of our business comes through referrals. I'm very proud of that as obviously it's a great endorsement of our work. But we are also actively involved in some of the industry networks that are pertinent to our clients and market sectors. For one, I am a member of QuEST Forum, which is

a telecom industry forum that I highly recommend people join. It is really useful in terms of getting the latest updates about the industry, but it also brings you together with the people that are active in the industry. Therefore, it is a wonderful way to do two things: get further informed, but also to network with people that you might be interested in working with.

**CEOCFO: *What is the key to working with emerging technologies? When you are dealing with a company where perhaps their concept does not seem viable to you, how do you create a campaign?***

**Ms. Wichmann:** There are two things we have learned. This is where our history plays a role. We were there before the first dot com boom, during, after, and now obviously in the midst of this one, so we have seen quite a few things! First of all, we critically assess whether we take on a startup or not. Sometimes it might be that a start-up is too far from being market-ready, or you can see that there might be issues with funding down the line, because the name of the game is now “can you monetize”; can you turn your solution into a money making solution.

You have to have a market for it. You have to have an audience for it. We have recently had cases where we thought that the technology by itself was actually very intelligent. I would say that we most often deal with very intelligent people, brilliant people, people who have thought about their solution and have refined it.

That does not always mean that they know about market entry and how to monetize their proposition. Our job, then, is to highlight what will be asked of them as they approach market entry. That means market research, again. It means that we share with them our knowledge about the particular target audiences they have. We will often carry out market surveys, market research studies, feasibility studies, to validate, hopefully, that their proposition will work; that in the end it will bring in the kind of return that they and their backers are hoping for.

**“My goal is that we keep innovating, keep learning and keep pushing the boundaries of what good communications can be.” - Barbara Wichmann**

Some companies come to us and they still have to validate that what they are offering is in fact viable, and we can assist in that process. We have learned and we can now with authority say that if we really feel that all of the data points to the conclusion that the current business model does not bode well, we will make strategic recommendations as to how to modify that. In fact, we often put companies in contact with people that we trust within our network that can advise them. Some companies, I have to say, almost launch by accident. They might get a call, someone hears about this company and thinks this is cool, some reporter calls and they do not necessarily realize the power of their response. They think they are just having a chat and the next thing you know they are out in the public. However, they are not ready to fulfill the orders. It could completely make the company fail.

**CEOCFO: *Would you tell us about the green initiatives for the company? Why is it important for you personally?***

**Ms. Wichmann:** Sustainability truly is a core value for ARTÉMIA. Back in 2005 we worked on several projects with international governments, specifically the Canadian, the British and the Dutch, on renewable energy. We really fully embraced it and continue to work with many clients to help them achieve their sustainability goals.

But I fear that it can be all too easy to pay lip-service to “sustainability”. If you are active in that space, it behooves you to practice what you preach. I felt that at some point over the last few years, it became so trendy – which is great - but there was really no standard. I thought, how do you even know what is green? Therefore, we decided to go and actually get certified. We did that in two ways. We did a Triple ISO Certification, which is really unique in the communications industry. One of those certifications is the ISO 14001 certification, which is actually the one that relates to sustainability and environmental management. That means that with the certifications comes an annual audit; an internal audit and then followed by an external audit, by an independent body. It’s incredibly detailed and the standards are very high.

So now, we feel confident in saying that we are a sustainable company. We measure it. We have annual goals that we in fact exceed. We source everything in accordance with our sustainability goals. We advise our clients to do it, so we really do have a 360 approach.

More recently, we were awarded recognition by the city and county of San Francisco as a green business. We got a wonderful plaque and were recognized during a ceremony at the end of January. They, again, came on the premises. They checked out everything. They measured everything. You name it. It has been evaluated. Personally, I take pride in that because I feel like it has some teeth. There is some substance associated with it. It is not just here is a stamp and therefore you are green. You have to uphold it, you have to prove it and hence we can actually make that statement.

**CEOCFO: *When you are talking with a potential client do they understand the depth of your offering and experience? Do they see how your approach is so much more than what seems to be standard or do they really understand that as time goes by?***

**Ms. Wichmann:** That is a very good question! As we work with companies and our relationship builds, they absolutely understand that. We prove it. We measure everything. We document everything in accordance with the ISO standards.

Many clients are referrals, as I mentioned, so they have already had a 'soft' introduction to our agency and the work we do. They come to us because someone else had vouched that we deliver beyond what normally would be expected. Therefore, they come with that expectation and obviously, then we start at a different point of conversation. We can say, "Yes, this is how we approach it, this is how we implement, this is how we measure and prove to you that we are, in fact, delivering the results that you want."

For non-referrals, we make a point of addressing that as part of our initial conversation. Obviously, you still have to prove it, but we have safeguards in place to demonstrate the quality of service that we provide.

When clients give us compliments they say things like we are "client-centric" and "pro-active" which means that we are really focusing on them. When a client comes to us with a particular assignment or project, we will look at what the context of that assignment is. Looking at the bigger picture is a key part of shaping a successful strategy. Let us say that you want to know if your media reach is sufficient for your company. We will also look at the implications of your media reach. There might be opportunities in terms of community relations that the client may not be aware of because they cannot be everywhere.

They need someone who looks out for them. That is what we provide for our clients.

Our goal is to be ahead of the client and to anticipate what else might play into strategic planning and implementation. Sometimes you have situations that are really complex and our collaborative approach can really help ease the process. Quite simply, we deliver and I'm proud that we have the client feedback to prove it.

**CEOCFO: *Do you do much work with government agencies?***

**Ms. Wichmann:** We do. As well as our work on renewable energy with the Canadian, British and Dutch governments, we have also worked with the US Department of Commerce. They have an agency that is called the Minority Business Development Agency. It is in existence to promote the contract and opportunities collaborations between minority businesses and government. These days, women owned businesses fall into that as well. We have represented foreign governments at industry forums and served as their official entry point and coordinated C-level meetings. We introduce them to certain stakeholders. Therefore, we are really familiar with official protocol, the rules of diplomacy and the process that is involved in working with a team that is tied into a government entity.

**CEOCFO: *What do you like to work on, personally? Are there particular types of projects or types of companies?***

**Ms. Wichmann:** We like all of our clients. I like all of our clients. That is a given. It is like you love all of your children, no preference! I thrive on the strategic challenge. That is because it forces you to continually take a very close look at your assumptions even though these assumptions are obviously based on experience and all of the research that we have done. It gives you that extra opportunity to maybe add some innovation to the mix, something that we have not done before, something that we feel that this particular client can adopt because it suits their corporate culture. It suits their value proposition. It suits their services whether it be B2C or B2B. I personally take a sense of pride from that, and value the opportunity to always be learning, always innovating.

**CEOCFO: *What is ahead for ARTÉMIA Communications?***

**Ms. Wichmann:** We have set some pretty ambitious goals for the company. We are planning for a future of sustained growth. My goal is that we keep innovating, keep learning and keep pushing the boundaries of what good communications can be. That is because, as certain industries become more popular, I feel like it is even more important to uphold the standards. There has to be a certain way to distinguish professional approaches from a nice hobby. My example of that is photography. These days we all think that we are photographers because we have so much great technology at hand. The iPhone or any phone these days has a great camera, so we all can take some quick, perfect shots. I happen to like really outstanding professional photography. A photo is a photo, but a good photo is something else, like a work of art. That applies to a profession too if you apply it that way. I want our agency to be known for the quality of work that it does for the content that we generate, for the communications strategies and tactics we create, for our seamless implementation. Therefore yes, quality and growth.

Our goal internally is that each year we take on a new challenge. That could be certification. That could be a particular learning opportunity for the team, and to enhance our management teams so that they can carry the torch.

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