WHO TO MEET

ENTREPRENEUR | MARLO FOGELMAN

Emphasizing an integrated approach

Post-Covid, marlo marketing further evolves with the launch of two outsourced marketing services divisions

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In mid-March 2020, as the Covid-19 pandemic began to grip the nation, Marlo Fogelman was faced with a stressful decision. The integrated marketing services agency she founded in Boston in 2004, marlo marketing, lost two-thirds of its business – which is largely focused on hospitality, lifestyle and CPG clients – seemingly overnight as the pandemic took hold. And she'd eventually be forced to give up her 10,000-square-foot office on Chauncy Street in Boston.

But a potentially business-changing opportunity emerged shortly after the March lockdown: Just before mask mandates went into effect, Fogelman received a potential client referral from a friend. A national, multilocation restaurant chain, Steak 'n Shake, based in Indianapolis, was in need of marketing assistance.

But landing the account would necessitate that Fogelman hop on a plane immediately to meet with Steak 'n Shake's CEO in San Antonio, Texas. And so, despite her fears of possibly contracting Covid during that trip, Fogelman made the trek to Texas.

"It was so scary at that point," Fogelman recalled. "But I figured, this is essential because if I hadn't taken this on – and it was enough money that it was worth it to me – then I would have probably had to let go of my entire hospitality practice. I honestly don't know if I could've built it back."

Having won the account (she never did contract Covid on that trip), Fogelman and her team went on to run a successful campaign for the company that led to continued work with them. In the process, she used that experience as a building block for a new division of her business focused on outsourced marketing services for the hospitality sector. She simultaneously developed something similar for the senior living sector. Both were a continuation of the type of work she had already been doing for some time with clients like Margaritas, a Mexican restaurant chain, and All American Assisted Living.

The shifting business landscape post-Covid, where clients were looking for cost-effective marketing solutions, Fogelman said, propelled her to formalize her plans for the two new divisions of her firm – Outsourced Hospitality Marketing and Outsourced Senior Living Marketing – which were officially launched this year.

Both divisions emphasize "fractional" CMO (chief marketing officer) or marketing/sales team support services. She stressed that the business model can vary.

GARY HIGGINS | BBJ

MARLO FOGELMAN

Title: Founder & CEO, marlo marketing

Age: 52

Residence: Boston

Education: JD, Boston University School of Law, 1997; Master's degree in international relations, Boston University, 1997

"In some instances, we completely replace the CMO and team and report directly to the CEO. In other instances, there is a CMO usually with a nominal team and my team becomes their 'team.' In both of those situations, it is generally intended to be an ongoing relationship," Fogelman said.

Fogelman considers the approach unique – "I haven't found anybody who's doing it the way we're doing it," she said – in that it combines the fractional CMO strategy and "execution."

The launch of these new divisions marks a key evolution for her business. She has long had a foothold in the hospitality/lifestyle space, but over time, her firm was asked to provide social media, digital marketing and website design services, among others – lending itself to an "integrated" approach that has led to a number of long-lasting client relationships. They include Zoo New England, Eastern Standard, Narragansett Beer and National Amusements.

"We were always an integrated marketing (agency)," Fogelman said.

Neil Newcomb, CEO of Kelly's Roast Beef Franchise LLC, a client for the past several years, engaged marlo marketing to perform "a brand refresh." As a result, he said, "we really improved our social media footprint ... and we improved some interior decor inside the restaurants. And we're better able to present ourselves to the public to communicate who we are and what we do."

Fogelman's staff count, which was up to 43 before Covid, currently stands at 18. Working remotely has turned out well for her organization, Fogelman added, noting that her team members are frequently together at client sites or events.

"Covid was a big reset for us," she said.