

Blackman Kallick Bartelstein, LLP

With over 200 professionals, Blackman Kallick Bartelstein, LLP is among the largest independently owned accounting and consulting firms in Chicago. Their practice encompasses the traditional disciplines – auditing, tax and financial planning – and also includes an array of consulting services. Their clients span a diverse group of industries including manufacturing, construction, service, not-for-profit, distribution, health care, hospitality and insurance.



Blackman Kallick Bartelstein LLP
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BUDD EICHNER
PARTNER,
BLACKMAN KALICK
BARTELSTEIN, LLP

Taking Client Relationships to the Next Level

The accounting and consulting industries are evolving rapidly — creating challenges and opportunities. The increasing number of mergers and acquisitions is changing the complexion of the marketplace. As competition grows fiercer, client retention programs have never been more important.

And the need to leverage existing clients through effective cross marketing is more critical than ever to ensure long-term growth and profitability.

The key to transforming these challenges into opportunities lies in a firm’s ability to maximize its return on relationships. Those that are most effective at cultivating and maintaining strong client ties will ultimately reap the greatest reward, both in terms of revenues and stability. Nobody knows this better than Chicago-based Blackman Kallick Bartelstein, LLP.

Using Relationship Intelligence to Uncover Business Opportunities

Blackman Kallick is keenly aware of the important role that relationships play in its success. Budd Eichner, Partner — and a 17-year veteran of the firm — is now dedicated full-time to the task of uncovering new business opportunities for the firm. “I’m involved full-time in marketing, sales and business development. It involves prospecting, making calls to prospective clients, writing proposals and working closely with our staff.”

Eichner knows that for business development to be successful, the firm needs a technology infrastructure that will support their efforts. “We needed a relational database where we could record, store and retrieve information about clients and prospective clients. It had to be a firm-wide resource that would allow us to quickly look up information about people and companies.” Eichner says that this type of technology allows the firm to efficiently maximize his business development efforts. “It lets us know where we should direct or redirect our efforts from a sales standpoint.”

In 1999, they discovered InterAction®, a Relationship Intelligence solution developed by Interface Software [now LexisNexis]. A client relationship management system designed for accounting firms, InterAction would help Blackman Kallick aggregate their internal data about people, companies, relationships, experience and expertise, and transform this data into Relationship Intelligence — competitive intelligence that can be leveraged to differentiate the firm from the competition, uncover new business opportunities and enhance client service.

Eichner says that InterAction enables him to capture the type of information he needs when prospecting for new clients. “I use it to record activities as I interact with various prospects — phone calls, meetings and other historical information. I can track information such as company size, employees, sales, date of incorporation, the names of family members — general demographic data.” He says that having immediate access to this type of information is critical for anyone interacting with contacts over time. “Once we have the information, I can use it to refresh my memory in the future.”

Robin Trasciatti, Blackman Kallick’s marketing coordinator, says that InterAction’s centralized knowledge base is extremely useful from a cross-selling perspective. “Every professional within the firm is involved in business development. The system can be extremely beneficial to help them get a full picture of the firm’s relationship with a prospect. For instance, if Budd has called on a particular person, InterAction will reveal this relationship. Then the professional can call on Budd to learn his insights. Or if someone is going to a meeting, he can look at the attendees’ historical data in InterAction. Later on, when introduced to that attendee he can say, ‘Oh, I see you referred a client to us last year. Thank you very much.’”

Moreover, Trasciatti says that InterAction allows them to track the progress of professionals' business development efforts. "We track their activities on a regular basis, and then run reports over this information. So, I can tell if a new client came to us through an expansion of existing business or through new business."

Through its unique Relationship Discovery process InterAction is also capable of integrating competitive intelligence from other enterprise applications. Trasciatti plans on tying the firm's time and billing system into InterAction's centralized database. Doing so will provide her with an even richer source of Relationship Intelligence from which to analyze the market. "For each new engagement, we add an activity in the system for estimated fees. When we interface with our time and billing data, I'll be able to compare estimated fees for all of our clients with actual fees. This will show us what add-on work we won versus what we initially anticipated."

Trasciatti feels that InterAction's ability to create and centrally access the firm's Relationship Intelligence provides the firm with significant value. "We can identify our recurring work, which is the meat of our practice, versus one-time engagements. The goal is to ensure that we're maintaining our level of new consulting engagements. We can also determine how much of our work is from our traditional practice areas versus our expansion areas, like consulting." As a result, Trasciatti says she is better equipped to engage in high-level strategic analysis of their marketplace. "For instance, we can focus on particular practice areas and determine how much work is being done on behalf of new versus existing clients. It might reveal that we have more work to do in order to attract new business to that practice area."

Eichner agrees, concluding that the competitive advantages InterAction delivers are concrete. "Knowledge is power. The more we know about people, companies and relationships, the better we're equipped to communicate with our clients and prospects. InterAction does an excellent job. It gives me the information that I need."

Projecting an Image of Quality and Leadership

For an accounting firm to thrive in today's competitive marketplace, it must serve as the client's most trusted advisor. To achieve this objective the firm must be capable of communicating effectively and flawlessly to clients and prospects, and demonstrate leadership in its practice areas.

Blackman Kallick has found that InterAction helps it accomplish these goals as well. "Our purpose is not solely to win an engagement. We also want to be seen as the experts in the field," Trasciatti explains. "We must be able to provide good information not only to clients, but to prospects, referral sources and the business community as a whole. It shows that we're on top of things, that we want to let people know what's going on."

She cites the health care industry as a case in point. "The regulations in this field change practically on a weekly basis. We publish many different newsletters on an array of topics. The firm has been able to compile a comprehensive mailing list to the health care marketplace. However, targeting the mailings had been a challenge. We needed to be able to send the appropriate newsletter to the appropriate contact."

The Marketing Automation component of InterAction proved ideal to enable Blackman Kallick to execute on the newsletter mailings quickly and efficiently. Trasciatti is able to simply check a box within the system to classify each contact company according to its specific health care niche. She can also specify who within the organization should receive the mailing. "InterAction makes it easy for me to see the lists and add contacts. I simply click on the list in which I want to add a contact. So, for instance, we can target Illinois nursing home administrators. Or we can send the mailing to all Iowa hospital CFOs."

Trasciatti adds that because InterAction makes it easy to execute targeted, one-to-one campaigns, it saves the firm money while simultaneously helping to bolster the firm's image. "It prevents us from having to do expensive mailings to our entire mailing list. That's a cost issue. But it also ensures that we don't annoy people by sending them mail that is not relevant to them. It also helps make certain that we don't send multiple mailings to the same person."

Do people notice the difference? Trasciatti says absolutely. "We've received good feedback from people thanking us for the information. InterAction is very, very reliable."

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