



Technology Investments Drive Growth for Event Managers

The early years are often the toughest for a new business. But for Bruce & Boivin Consulting Group Inc., a Winnipeg-based event management company that's built a niche serving governments and Aboriginal organizations, the first stretch out of the gate has led to one milestone year after another.

"We've seen a hundred per cent growth year-over-year in the last five years," says Angie Bruce, who founded the company in 2009 with her aunt, Barbara Bruce – who still works for the company but is no longer a partner – and a former competitor, Michelle Boivin. "In particular, we're seeing a lot of growth among organizations that represent indigenous peoples in both Canada and other parts of the world."

With their business now firmly established, Ms. Bruce and Ms. Boivin are ready to advance to the next level of growth – and they're counting on a digital strategy to help them get there.

Bruce & Boivin, which is currently going through a rebranding, is investing in technology that includes a redesigned website with a platform that will incorporate event-specific functions – such as online conference registration – and social media. The company is also building an app that conference participants can download onto their mobile devices.

"Once they're registered, they can easily stay up to date with what's happening at the event, and if they want to change a session, they just do that right on their phone," says Ms. Bruce, whose company organizes conferences and events that attract participants from across Canada and around the world. "The new system will also streamline registration. When people arrive at a conference, we can just bring up their information on a tablet so there's no need to fill out any paper forms."

The company expects its technology investment to pay off in multiple ways. A streamlined system will lower labour costs and improve client services. This could in turn translate to an increase in sales of the company's registration services, which currently account for almost half of Bruce & Boivin's revenues.

For conference participants, Bruce & Boivin's digital strategy would mean an enhanced event experience, with better opportunities to make strategic connections in their industry. The company's app, for example, will also allow guests to engage with each other on social media and connect through online forums.

"And every event we are coordinating would be on our app, making it easier for participants to plan their calendar," says Ms. Bruce. "For organizations hosting the events, this would help them market their event and increase attendance."



Angie Bruce, Barbara Bruce and Michelle Boivin are growing their event management company Bruce & Boivin by rebuilding their website and developing an app that will make it easier for conference participants to register for events and stay connected with their peers.



Whether they're a young enterprise like Bruce & Boivin or a multinational corporation, today's businesses can significantly boost growth and enhance their competitive edge with a well-executed digital strategy, says Rochelle Grayson, a social media instructor, program adviser and industry chair for the University of British Columbia's digital strategy certificate program.

But to achieve results, companies need to ensure their digital strategy is aligned with their business goals.

"They have to deliver concrete results, such as automating processes for greater efficiency and increasing or opening up new sources of revenue," says Ms. Grayson, an award-winning digital media entrepreneur whose latest venture, ArtSites.ca, makes it easy for artists to build and maintain websites to showcase their art.

Her advice for entrepreneurs who are considering a digital strategy: understand what your business and customers need, and how digital and social media technology can address those needs. It's also a good idea to let your customers, partners and suppliers in on what you're planning to do.

"Tell people about your new vision," says Ms. Grayson. "They might say 'I'd love to help you make that happen' or they might offer some great ideas. It's an excellent way to get incredible market intelligence."

With so many tools and technologies on the market today, launching a digital strategy has become a lot easier and cost-effective, says Ms. Grayson. It's an observation that's echoed by Ms. Bruce, who estimates a \$30,000 outlay for her company's revamped website and event app.

"It's an investment that's really going to pay off for us and for our clients," she says.

CIBC Tips: Using Digital Strategies to Engage Clients

- 1. Align digital strategies to your goals** Your business plan should form the basis for your digital strategy. Whatever the tactic, your strategy should align with your mission and vision. For a client-focused company, this means examining how to better serve your customers and how to reach prospects. Look to existing client touchpoints to determine if there's a way to improve these experiences and interactions.
- 2. Measure your impact** As you plan to roll out your digital strategy, consider what impact it could have on your clients. What factors will tell you if you've succeeded or if there is room for improvement? Set goals accordingly and report on them regularly to your stakeholders. This will help you make more informed decisions in the future and ultimately determine if you should stay the course with the current plan.
- 3. Share your successes** Whether your digital strategy is directly client-facing or not, it will inevitably have an impact on your customers. Consider how you want to communicate with your network, whether it's upfront transparency about upcoming changes or a post-implementation update. Promote your investment and ultimately any positive outcomes will reflect positively on your brand.

For more Small Business tips from CIBC, visit cibc.com/businessadvice

This article originally appeared in The Globe and Mail / globeandmail.com in a Redefining Success small business series produced by RandallAnthony Communications Inc. (randallanthony.com / TheRAC.ca) in co-operation with The Globe and Mail's Custom Content Group. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.

Originally published June 19, 2014.