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“Bulldog Solutions is uniquely positioned in that it offers this type of package—both marketing expertise and reliable execution.”

Shawn de Souza
Director of Marketing
VFM Leonardo Inc.



Summary

VFM Leonardo, a technology and online media company focused on the travel industry, exceeded registration goals by nearly 100% and generated high levels of prospect engagement by developing a thought-leadership driven strategic messaging and media plan for its lead-generation Webinar.

Challenge

VFM Leonardo is a new company in a fast-changing industry, faced with the dual challenges of generating leads for its business and framing its concept of online merchandising to educate hotel properties about its purpose. The company is the product of VFM Interactive's acquisition of Leonardo Media to create a large provider of platforms by which hotels can distribute rich media (photos, virtual tours, video) via Global Distribution Systems, major travel sites such as Travelocity and Priceline and thousands of additional travel Web sites.

Director of Marketing Shawn de Souza was tasked with generating leads for the company's sales teams. VFM Leonardo serves hotel properties that want to put their visual content in front of travelers to differentiate their properties from other properties that might also meet the traveler's needs. For example, de Souza said, if a traveler is searching

online for a hotel in a specific area, he's likely to find several options that meet that geographic need. At that point, what differentiates the one that he chooses from the ones he doesn't? That's where merchandising comes in: connecting with the prospect on an emotional level at the point of sale.

The online space for hotel marketing is fast-changing, de Souza notes, and VFM Leonardo's strategy is to become the thought leader.

“We're not just trying to shove a product down their throat,” de Souza said. “We are the experts. We're having good conversations. We're telling our team ‘Don't sell to them. They are interested in the content. Be the trusted advisor and keep that conversation going.’ If we invest our time now, it will pay off.”

Solution

de Souza had previously worked with marketing automation leader Eloqua, a Bulldog Solutions partner and client; and VFM Leonardo's new CMO, John McAuliffe, had been VP, Marketing at Bulldog Solutions client Objectivity. The two agreed that Bulldog Solutions was the ideal partner to manage a lead-generation Webinar program leveraging VFM Leonardo's thought leadership.

“We want our customers to look at us as subject matter experts,” de Souza said. “By the same token, I look upon Bulldog as the experts in developing and managing lead-generation Webinars.”

“In this business, I need to scale, and to achieve scale I need a reliable partner,” he said.

The right message at the right time

de Souza kicked off his Webinar series with an April 14, 2009, live Webinar titled “How to Better Merchandize Your Hotel Online.” The topic and message, developed by VFM Leonardo and polished by Bulldog Solutions’ marcom and design teams, was a successful mix of the right speakers and the right message at the right time, de Souza said.

“The big thing everyone is jumping on is SEO and Google,” he said. “The whole social media area as it relates to online travel, all of that is of great fascination right now.”

VFM Leonardo engaged thought leaders to deliver the information: Joe Humphrey, founder and CEO of marketing consultant Humphrey Services Corporation, and David Attardi, director of e-commerce for the B.F. Saul Company Hotel Division.

“Joe Humphrey is really well known in the industry and I think he brought a lot of the audience,” de Souza said. “It was the optimal mix of Joe and a customer, David. People who attended are peers of David’s. They want to know what he’s doing.”

Additionally, VFM Leonardo structured a media plan that included third-party media placement, its own house list, press releases and social media. Bulldog Solutions developed the external media message and worked with de Souza to establish the media plan and third-party media buying.

Results

Registration for the Webinar was 951 people, almost double the number that de Souza expected based on a previous test of the topic and message. Attendance to the live Webinar was 43% – above the industry average of 30% to 40% – and those attendees submitted more than 50 questions for the speakers. VFM Leonardo repurposed the content by answering the questions on its blog, and followed up individually with the attendees.

“We’re well engaged with these people,” de Souza said. “This establishes our credibility.”

de Souza credits the timely, thought-leadership driven topic and Bulldog Solutions’ execution of the program for its



success. A technology veteran himself, he says he’s qualified to say it takes more than just the technology platform to make a program work.

“Bulldog Solutions is uniquely positioned in that it offers this type of package—both marketing expertise and reliable execution,” he said.

“I’ve worked with other vendors, but at the end of the day, they don’t really get the marketing side of it. Most of them are using the tool but not the marketing process.”