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Bradford-Jennings designs marketing campaign for Fresh Start Enterprises Property Services - Reinventing a business by writing on the walls

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"It is all written on the walls." When I heard that, I knew my consulting work with Fresh Start Enterprises Property Services was going to be a different experience. A few years ago, I decided to launch my consulting firm, the Crystal Pen Group, after two decades in corporate marketing communications and several more years with non-profits. Crystal Pen brings the best of my business experience to non-profits who want to increase their revenues through grants, marketing and other strategies.

Fresh Start Enterprises Property Services is a "different" kind of client. They provide painting, drywall, cleaning, remodeling, landscape maintenance - just about everything needed to keep a commercial property's appearance in top shape.

What makes Fresh Start Enterprises "different" is their mission. They are also a program that uses the "Power of Work" to break down barriers to employment for the thousands of individuals returning home from prison every year. The clients also received other services such as case management, counseling, and mentoring from successful ex-offenders. A legal job is key to helping these men stay out of prison for good. In fact, in the state of Connecticut, without the support of a program like Fresh Start Enterprises, they have a 69% chance of returning to prison.

Intriguing, right? A business AND a social do-gooder program all rolled up in one. A property manager can get quality property services AND make a positive impact on society at the same time. It is the only business of its kind in Fairfield County. In the non-profit world, they call this a "Social Enterprise". I call it a business model that makes sense.

I was approached about working with Fresh Start Enterprises while I was consulting with their parent organization, Family ReEntry, where I had spent five years as their development and communications director. In the years since my departure, the business showed some successes - over 300 men enrolled in the program, over 250 projects completed, and most importantly, a 25% reduction in re-incarceration. But the business was having growing pains. Sales were not growing with the original business-to-consumer model. Without growth, there would not be enough opportunities to train and employ clients and there could not be a continuing reduction in re-incarceration. An overhaul was needed.

When I came on board, the new management team was already injecting new energy into the business. Ideas around training and customer service were flowing. New sales targets were being identified. Ways to improve operations were being generated. It was all there...on the walls...literally. There was something very freeing about seeing the new business direction everywhere you looked. The only thing was, are the "writings on the wall" going to get everyone moving in the same direction?

Around the same time, an organization called The Social Impact Exchange began accepting applications for their National Business Plan Competition. The competition was for social enterprises that wanted their business to make a societal impact on a larger scale.

Perfect! The team knew what direction they wanted to take Fresh Start Enterprises...it was all on the walls. I knew how to write a business plan. The competition was the motivator.

So, here was my challenge, "How do I blend business goals and social impact into the new business model?" After reviewing the walls, attending meetings and spending hours with the Fresh Start Enterprises team leader, I decided to pull everything under three strategies. They needed to 1) Train and employ more men to prepare them for long term employment and make a social impact, 2) Focus solely on property services for commercial real estate to improve operations, and 3) Generate more projects through sales focused on new and existing customers.

With this new model, my Fresh Start Enterprises Business Plan made it to the semi-finals of the competition. Jeff Grant, board of directors and Fresh Start Enterprises team leader, told me, "Sondra, you were a tremendous asset. You understood from the start that we were converting from a business-to-consumer to a business-to-business model, and helped us shape our brand, message and business plan. You have the compassion that everyone should have for those deserving their second chance in life."

I am now designing the marketing campaign for Fresh Start Enterprises. The team continues to write on the walls, but now it is one wall with white board paint in a room remodeled by their work crews. More important, more men who want to work are benefiting from Fresh Start Enterprises and customers know they are making an impact on society.

Sondra Bradford-Jennings is president of Crystal Pen Group, Brookfield, Conn.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540