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Q&A with David Searns, Co-CEO of Haley Marketing: A Discussion about Marketing for the Staffing Industry during the Pandemic and Effectively Moving Forward

February 8, 2021: Michael Bartels, Chief Development Officer of Becker LLC, interviewed fellow Industry Partner David Searns, Co-CEO of Haley Marketing, discussing how David has consulted with his Staffing Clients through the Pandemic and planning forward in 2021.

Bartels: The Staffing Industry overall was positive during this difficult time while a few niches took a hit through the Pandemic. How did you advise your clients in regards to their Marketing strategies during this period?

Searns: Great question. When the pandemic first hit, I thought it was going to be devastating to the industry. I've been through the 2001-2003 recessions and of course the Great Recession, and I've seen how hard staffing gets hit in a downturn. Looking back at 2009 (and this sounds totally self-promotional, but it's also true), we saw that staffing companies that got more aggressive about marketing during the recession fell less, recovered quicker, and recovered at a higher level than those that cut marketing.

So in March, we put together a website filled with free resources (www.haleymarketing.com/covid-recovery) to give our clients (and the industry as a whole) lots of ideas for beating what we assumed would be a long, painful period for the industry. While some sectors, like hospitality, experienced the kind of horrific decline we anticipated, most were not as severely hit, and some, like healthcare, have thrived. What I did not expect was that recruiting would continue to be the #1 challenge in the industry, and over the past several months, most of our recommendations have been around recruitment marketing strategies and how to get more of those open job orders filled.

Bartels: I would imagine many of your clients had to reduce their marketing budgets. What did your teams do to continue to work with these clients and how did you advise them through budget cuts?

Searns: Your imagination is dead on. Despite the data to the contrary, some of our clients did reduce their budgets (we tracked every client that asked to either put services on hold or cancel). Our first step with these companies was to talk to each one of them. We wanted to see how we could help, and we worked with many clients to defer payment, offer free months of service, and do all we could to help them survive.

Our most important piece of advice was to do everything possible not to "go dark" because when you stop marketing, and decrease your visibility in the market, employers and job seekers assume you either went out of business or are in trouble. And who wants to work with a staffing company that is in financial trouble?

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Bartels: *Marketing and marketing programs used to be viewed as difficult to measure ROI, what is your view on this? How do you advise your Staffing clients during this difficult time to increase or decrease their Marketing strategies?*

Searns: The good news about marketing today is that it is easier than ever to track ROI. In our monthly and quarterly reporting, we are able to show the specific results of marketing activities that are driving people directly to purchase (or applying for a job), as well as the activities driving people to “near to purchase” – basically, getting them to contact forms on a website, local office pages, and the company jobs pages.

Over the past year, we’ve been advising people to get the most out of every dollar. This has been a time to reduce spending on the “nice to have” marketing and double down on the activities that are supporting sales and recruiting.

Bartels: *Thought Leadership and individual webinars seem to have replaced the numerous conferences we all look forward to and attend to gain more industry knowledge. How has this affected the Marketing platforms for staffing company owners?*

Searns: Let’s not talk about cancelled conferences. In an average year, our team attends 25 to 30 industry events, and losing all that quality time with our clients and friends in the industry was really tough. But when it comes to marketing, being virtual can actually be an advantage. In 2020, people spent double the time they normally spend on social media. They also consumed incredible amounts of digital content, and while many people may have binge watched Tiger Kings, many more were using the pandemic as a time to learn.

For staffing companies, there is always an opportunity to bring quality ideas to their clients and prospects (and candidates). Sharing ideas builds your brand, strengthens your positioning, differentiates your services, and gives you more things to discuss on sales calls. The trick is to really know your audience. Who are you targeting? What are their challenges? What do they want to learn? Your content has to come from an intimate knowledge of your audience.

In marketing, we talk about creating “buyer personas” basically detailed profiles of your ideal clients and candidates. Once a company has clearly defined the personas of the people they want to reach, they can then develop a content strategy to reach those people. The strategy might include blog writing, educational videos (video was HUGE in 2020 and will continue to grow), webinars, podcasts, or live events via Zoom or other platforms.

It’s funny. I have joked with many of our clients that 2020 made us all TV stars—we’re all comfortable on camera now. We need to use that to our advantage to create video content that educates, adds value, humanizes our brand, and helps to replace the face-to-face selling that we lost—and may never fully get back.

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Bartels: Marketing is a key component for sales and recruiting. On a look forward for the Staffing Industry as we start to climb out of the Pandemic, how should owners be preparing their Marketing platforms and programs to position themselves as leaders in the industry?

Searns: I want to change your question a bit. Not every company wants to be an industry leader, and that's okay. Step one in determining the right marketing strategies for 2021 is to clearly define your goals. Where do you want to be in twelve months? What types of clients (and candidates) do you want to serve? How do you want to be seen? And what will it take to get from where you are today to where you want to be?

Now back to your question. As we look at 2021, we are reminding our clients that they need a two-pronged strategy for their marketing. First, they need a game plan for recruitment marketing. Almost every company is struggling to find talent. The solution is not to just post more jobs, it's to have a holistic recruitment marketing strategy that maximizes attraction and retention.

Great recruitment marketing addresses:

- Optimizing career site performance to avoid losing candidates
- Maximizing the ROI of job advertising spend
- Retaining (and redeploying) current talent
- Having social recruiting strategies for both active and passive job seekers
- Building a stronger employment brand with a clear value proposition, great visibility, and strong reviews

Then the second prong is supporting the sales team. Regardless of how many open orders a company has, they still need to drive new business, and selling today is harder than ever. To support the sales team, we advise our clients to start with two primary strategies:

- Integrated direct marketing (incorporating marketing with their sales process to strategically target ideal prospects and improve sales efficiency)
- Content and inbound marketing (to get found by employers they are not calling on)

Just last month, I did a webinar on the best marketing strategies for 2021. If anyone wants to watch, it's available on demand at: <https://lunchwithhaley.com/2021/01/11/2021-marketing-strategy-for-staffing-and-recruiting/>

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About the Authors:



About David Searns: David is the Co-CEO of Haley Marketing, a content, digital marketing and web design firm that focuses exclusively on the staffing industry. For the past 24 years, David and his team have helped staffing companies to stand out from the competition, improve recruiting response, increase sales productivity, and stay top-of-mind with employers and job seekers.

Prior to forming Haley Marketing, David was Director of Marketing for a Western New York temporary staffing and direct placement service. He holds an MBA from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and a Bachelor's Degree in Management Information Systems from Clarkson University.

Haley Marketing offers website design, blogging and social media, job advertising management, email and direct mail marketing, search engine marketing, reputation management, strategy development and creative services.

For more information about Haley Marketing, please visit www.haleymarketing.com.



About Michael A. Bartels: Michael is the firm's Chief Development Officer and brings over 20 years of experience in sales, networking and finance across a wide variety of industries. As part of the Staffing team, Mike oversees all business development and marketing activities, while working closely with team members, industry partners and staffing clients to ensure complete satisfaction is realized between the firm, our partners and clients.

Mike is an active member of numerous state and national staffing industry trade associations and is a Board Member of The New Jersey Staffing Alliance. He has presented and moderates panels along with writing articles for the various Staffing trade associations.

About Becker LLC: Becker LLC is a premiere mid-market firm recognized as a leader in the staffing industry. With offices in New York, California, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, the firm provides forward thinking, mission-critical advice to staffing industry entrepreneurs and management on high stakes, complex legal matters as well as day-to-day matters and long-term plans. The firm are proud to be members of the following Staffing Associations: SIA, ASA, ASG, TempNet, CSP, MSA, NJSA, NYSA and serves as general counsel to the Mid Atlantic Staffing Association.