

IN PERSON

Getting to know the executives who make business tick



MORE Advertising
Principals Judi Haber, left, and Donna Latson Gittens consult on a campaign.

W. MARC BERNSAU

ENTREPRENEUR | MORE ADVERTISING

All about the cause

CAUSE-RELATED SHOP FOUNDERS GET THE MESSAGE OUT

MORE Advertising

BUSINESS: Marketing and advertising

HEADQUARTERS: Watertown

REVENUE: Not disclosed

MAJOR PRINCIPALS: Donna Latson Gittens, Judi Haber

BY JERRY BERGER | *Special to the Journal*

Twenty years ago, Donna Latson Gittens decided it was time to leave her job as vice president of public affairs at WCVB-TV and strike out on her own to pursue her passion in cause-related marketing. About a month later she met Judi Haber, a recent refugee from a Fortune 50 company. The solo venture quickly became a team effort.

An introduction from a mutual friend created the partnership between Latson Gittens, the CEO and founder, and Haber, now principal and president. Haber had been looking for a part-time opportunity that could also draw on her background in social services and they agreed she would help run the business side and formulate strategy.

“Within 30 to 45 days it went from part-time to full-time,” said Haber.

Today, MORE Advertising has the capacity to serve up to 40 clients annually with a staff of 12 and a consultant team of 15 to create multimedia campaigns on issues ranging from smoking cessation and substance abuse reduction to corporate brand awareness and workplace diversity. The firm is one of the first minority- and woman-owned agencies in the Northeast and is certified by the Massachusetts Office of Supplier Diversity.

“We use the media for all the right reasons,” said Latson Gittens, a Dorchester resident who launched the firm, then known as causemedia, after more than 20 years at WCVB, where she spearheaded public affairs efforts.

Typical of their work product is the recent #StateWithoutStigMA campaign developed with the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services to address the growing problem of opioid addiction. The effort, which used television, outdoor advertising and other tools centered around the social media hashtag, focused on

the message that stigma is based on myths, prejudice and hate, which often prevents those with opioid addiction from getting help and treatment.

The goal, says Haber, who lives in Newton, was to raise awareness of among parents about the dangers of addiction that can begin with prescription opioids. That message was stressed through on-camera interviews featuring “real-life, poignant vignettes.”

“We want to connect with families,” she said.

Other notable clients have included UMass Boston, The Red Sox Foundation and the Home Base program serving veterans and families coping with the “invisible wounds of war.”

That focus has earned the firm strong praise for its professionalism and creativity and its understanding of the importance of client missions.

“In addition to really being able to listen to clients and focus groups, they really understand the charitable mission,” said Joy Rosen, vice president, behavioral health in the Massachusetts General Hospital Department of Psychiatry. She has known Latson Gittens for many years, helped encourage her to go out on her own and then worked with the fledgling firm after it won a contract from the Department of Public Health on smoking cessation.

Latson Gittens says it has not been all smooth sailing for the firm, which initially used “virtual employees” until it realized the arrangement was not conducive to a consistent look and feel.

There were also two economic downturns to weather as well as growing pains. The firm had a somewhat peripatetic early existence that saw it move from its initial location in Watertown to Newton and then back to a larger space in the original Watertown building. In addition to their own expanded quarters, the firm is also able to work with more easily with independent audio and video production companies also located in the building.

Perhaps the biggest adjustment to their initial business plan was expanding their focus from education, not-for-profit and public sector clients to companies “who do business in the community and help their community,” said Latson Gittens. Unchanged, however, has been the guiding principle learned at WCVB, which was simply to “surround yourself with people who may be smarter than you.”

LESSONS LEARNED

What inspired you to start your business?



CHARLIE BALANOFF
PRINCIPAL, SENIOR BENEFITS CONSULTING

The aging population entering assisted living and nursing homes has opened an opportunity to help navigate the benefits available through federal and state agencies. Qualifying for these benefits while protecting assets inspired me to insure that they know everything available to them during these difficult times.



JEAN DUVOISIN
DIRECTOR, DUVOISINDESIGN.COM

As a kid I always doodled in class and loved visual communication, color, type, etc. After college graduation, I wanted to continue in the branding/design niche, which was different than most options in advertising. The best option was starting my own company.



MARIE PEELER
FOUNDER/PRINCIPAL, PEELER ASSOCIATES

When I left corporate general management, people asked me to help them improve their communication, interpersonal relationships, and overall leadership. I love it and in 2005 they inspired me to seek coach-specific training, start my business, and coach full time.

FUTURE LESSON LEARNED:

Does your company have a succession plan?

Send your 25-30 word answer to gwalsh@bizjournals.com. Be sure to include a high-resolution headshot.