

## THE AGE OF QUANTIFIABLE MARKETING

### McKinley Marketing Partners' Michelle Boggs, CEO & Co-Founder and Martin Hendershot, Director of Client Services, Share Their Firm's Unique Position



Michelle J. Boggs

*Marketing is in great demand, now more than ever. In many businesses today, chief marketing officers are as valued as chief financial officers. This is largely because digital marketing now allows for quantifiable results, which had been elusive for so long. As such, companies are investing in digital strategies and they are doubling down on growth. McKinley Marketing Partners' president, CEO, & co-founder Michelle Boggs discusses how her company helps fill the demand by providing high quality marketing talent with additional insight from Martin Hendershot, director of client services.*



Martin Hendershot

*Ms. Boggs' leadership and instinct for optimizing business processes and procedures have driven McKinley's growth and solidified its reputation for consistently providing high quality marketing talent. She began her career in commercial development before transitioning into marketing and public relations. After working in sports marketing for a decade, she decided to switch gears and begin consulting independently. As a marketing consultant, Ms. Boggs was able to leverage her marketing and business development skills while maintaining a healthy work-life balance—an experience she wanted to share with others. As a result, she founded McKinley Marketing Partners and celebrates the company's 21st anniversary this year.*

*Martin Hendershot is an experienced marketing professional with over seven years of B2B and consumer experience, ranging from strategic planning to program and project management. He is responsible for managing client services, marketing and recruiting. Mr. Hendershot's dedication to growing McKinley and his expertise make him a valuable member of the firm's executive team. He provides strategic analysis and planning, directs the customer relationship lifecycle and oversees the firm's overall recruiting and marketing efforts.*

McKinley Marketing Partners was founded in 1995 with the purpose of filling a need created by the federal Family and Medical Leave Act, signed by President Bill Clinton two years earlier. The idea, originated by co-founder Amanda Weathersby, was to supply organizations with interim marketing consultants who could hit the ground running when executives took time off for family or due to an illness. Filling those roles would be top-notch marketing professionals who, following their own hiatus, were returning to the workforce.

It soon became apparent, however, that our fledgling firm had tapped into something that took it far beyond its original proposition: it quickly morphed into a new population who wanted to adopt a different lifestyle as independent consultants, who had good jobs, yet wanted to leave the full-time corporate environment and still add value to distinct projects.

And though McKinley Marketing Partners started out serving the telecom industry exclusively, it was not long before our company diversified and expanded its client

base. As it turned out, many organizations needed temporary marketing help for more than just filling the voids produced by the federal Leave Act. Today, after 21 years in business, we have completed upwards of 1,800 projects for several hundred client companies; we serve companies of all shapes and sizes. The differences among some of our clients are stark. We serve some of the biggest companies in the world as well as some of the smaller nonprofits and everything in between. We are based in Alexandria, Virginia with offices in New York and Texas.

The marketing consultants enlisted by our firm run the gamut of skill sets. Their expertise includes: digital, communications, project management, research and analysis, as well as relationship management. A recent study we conducted on the hiring trends in marketing for 2016 uncovered a growing demand for both digital and strategic marketers, which we see realized daily. In 2015, 90 percent of all client requirements requested of McKinley Marketing Partners called for digital marketing experience and/or analytic skills.

The possibilities for interim marketing help – be it for project work or contract-to-hire work – are wide-ranging. When there is transition, upheaval, and growth, that is usually an excellent time for us to play a role in helping organizations fill gaps. Sometimes a high-growth client has a sudden need for talent in a specific area. Sometimes a reorganization within a client company creates the need for temporary staffing. Sometimes it is a new initiative that produces that need. Or a new product. Or a new piece of business that must be immediately addressed. Sometimes a consultant is called upon to perform work left undone while the client seeks to fill a full-time role. McKinley Marketing Partners can also help clients find that full-time person, or “direct hire” in the parlance of our field.

For McKinley Marketing Partners, referrals are a major source for finding individuals to fill gap positions. Our firm has an extensive network of clients and consultants that has been built over two decades. Our expert recruiters are also well-versed in scouring the landscape for talent, both online and elsewhere. Tools like LinkedIn and job boards, as well as outreach at marketing events and the like, are all part of our recruitment equation.

In many ways, McKinley Marketing Partners provides a win-win service for our clients and our consultants that goes beyond the job at hand. Our consultants bring both broad industry knowledge and skill set knowledge, which can remain with a client organization long after they have completed their projects. For their part, those consultants come away with invaluable experience concerning how different businesses are run, in addition to insight regarding their respective approaches to using varied marketing tools. This value-add is a big part of what is drawing so many to the marketing staffing niche these days.

When McKinley Marketing Partners started, our approach was in many ways a foreign concept to would-be clients. Fast forward to today and one finds a staffing industry, and its marketing/creative sector in particular, that is intensely competitive. A study by Addeco Staffing USA recently revealed that 76 percent of companies are now using contingent labor to enhance their workforce and close talent gaps.

All this comes at a time when marketing itself is enjoying elevated status. In many businesses today, chief marketing officers are as valued as chief financial officers. This is largely because digital marketing now allows for quantifiable results, which had been elusive for so long. As such, companies are investing in digital strategies and they are doubling down on the growth, because being able to measure something has always been the key to good business decisions. It answers questions like ‘How is this going to make me money?’ Previously, when recessions hit, marketing has typically been one of the first expenditures that companies cut back on. We do not expect we will see that happen again; marketing is too important now that it is measurable as a proven revenue generator.

### **The Age of Quantifiable Marketing**

In an age of quantifiable marketing, technical skills in the use and application of the many new digital tools tend to be a necessity for consultants, in conjunction with having a good marketing mindset. As more corporate dollars flow into digital marketing – marketing budgets increased as much as 10 to 11 percent of revenues in 2015, according to the technology research firm, Gartner, Inc. – demand is growing exponentially for talent with the requisite expertise. A recent report by the Chief Marketing Officer Council and Ebiquity, in fact, illustrated that 83 percent of marketers are trying to address growing digital needs by seeking out “unique skill sets and specialized capabilities not found in most ad agencies of media buying firms.”

One way McKinley Marketing Partners differentiates itself is by first making sure we thoroughly understand our clients’ needs, then by matching those organizations with well-vetted consultants. It helps that so many employees at our firm have experience as marketers themselves. Marketing is incredibly nuanced and always changing, and that is why we place such importance on the depth of our team’s marketing experience. To make the right placements, you have to understand this world inside and out. And we take it a step further with a number of our own staff members having lived the life of a marketing consultant before.

A hallmark of McKinley Marketing Partners’ approach is our extensive vetting process. Though our firm largely

handles project work, we apply the same strict vetting standards to all assignments, including direct hires. Even after a consultant is placed, our firm ensures that all is going well for both consultant and client by conducting periodic health checks.

A common theme at McKinley is that a person is more than a resume. We recognize that there is more to a person than what is captured in a few bullets, on a couple of pages. We strive to get to know each one of our consultants because, truthfully, it is critical to successful placements. Part of our secret sauce is recognizing the environments where our consultants will thrive and subsequently making those matches.

### **The Digital Shift**

The digital shift can pose challenges for companies, and for staffing firms, as positions become more nuanced. Today there are crucial technical skills, such as reporting and segmentation. For example, in prior years, when a client requested an email marketer, the criterion was an individual who had written and distributed marketing emails. In more recent years, however, we hear requests such as: "I want an email marketer who has experience with Marketo, Eloqua, or Pardot," which are all marketing automation tools, "and who has experience segmenting for membership retention and can show me results in terms of measuring the success of campaigns and how they take that data and turn it into actionable results." Client requests are no longer just for someone who can do something, but rather, for someone who can do something using a specific tool and for a specific purpose. In fact, 13 percent of requirements requested of McKinley in the first half of 2016 mention one of the main automation platforms by name as a required skill set.

That is not to say that the field has gone completely digital. We still fill generalist or traditional marketing communications roles or even the occasional direct-mail role. But where the momentum and tide are going is to the digital and technical world of marketing.

And though McKinley Marketing Partners tends to recruit local talent, clients are increasingly open to remote workers, which means that, in many cases, a consultant can hail from virtually anywhere. Findings from one of our 2016

surveys demonstrate a significant rise in the acceptability of remote workers, with 70 percent of respondents reporting a willingness to hire them. Technology has also allowed for consultants who, on any given day, might be unable to make it into a client's workplace, due to bad weather for example, to access the tools they need at home instead. But at the end of the day, companies still want the consultants to come in periodically or during defined intervals. They want them to interact with their team on-site and to sit in on meetings. So while companies are open to it, it does not mean the role is 100% remote.

Our firm's clients usually have no issue with consultants having worked for our competitors, though non-compete restrictions do arise. Nor does it tend to matter that the consultant's experience comes from a different industry than the client. A more typical concern is whether the consultant's experience has been with business-to-business or business-to-consumer companies. Many hiring managers from one genre or the other feel that the approaches and cultures are simply too different. Often times they have no interest in bringing someone aboard who would have to traverse that chasm. Understanding a client's attitude in this regard is one of the most important things for us to identify from the start.

Marketing is in great demand, now more than ever. That our rates have increased in recent years, in the vicinity of four to five percent a year, is not necessarily a reflection of placing more senior resources. It is about the type of positions being filled as well as specialization needs, the more technical nature of marketing, and the fact that marketing is being proven out and quantified. It is a really attractive time to be a marketer and to be looking for marketers because the salaries are commensurate with the types of positions available and the results these roles produce.

And this is just the beginning. A decade ago, in the so-called Web 2.0 era, as marketing moved beyond email and deeper into the digital age, the focus on social media, blogging, search engine marketing, and search engine optimization was regarded as something of a panacea.

Today, at the dawn of the quantifiable era, those methods play more of a supporting role. Now there are automation

programs, market research, database marketing, CRM tools, and sophisticated segmentation strategies. Marketing is now as much a part of the big data revolution as any other part of a company. With this influx of information the question becomes: how are we going to use it? How are you going to leverage the intel to optimize your team and your resources? Businesses are seeing the early stages of big data manifesting itself in marketing, and will likely continue to see its development in years to come. We can expect to see increased competition from tech companies

proffering new tools and solutions in service of the data revolution in tandem with more sophistication in the types of roles and how companies use the information they have.

McKinley Marketing Partners expects to be in the middle of the action for some time to come. In our industry, the staffing industry, the marketing/creative space is growing. In some cases, it is outpacing other industries within the staffing world. More and more companies are using marketing staffing companies to fill the gaps. And it's here to stay.