



CASE STUDY

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Reaching a Specialized Client Base:  
Blue Star Design Partners with  
The McGowan Companies



**T**he McGowan Companies create specialty insurance products for highly specific markets, helping organizations manage unique risks that standard liability coverage misses.

For example, it helps restaurants, hotels, and family entertainment centers address their specific market risks by securing coverage for active-shooter scenarios, workplace violence, and the business impacts of terrorist attacks.

The inherent drama and tragedy of these events creates immense storytelling opportunities for a company like McGowan. In the hands of a skilled content marketing team, these stories can connect McGowan with the people it's in business to protect.

## The Challenge — HubSpot, SEO, and Keywords

### In 2015, McGowan was in a bind:

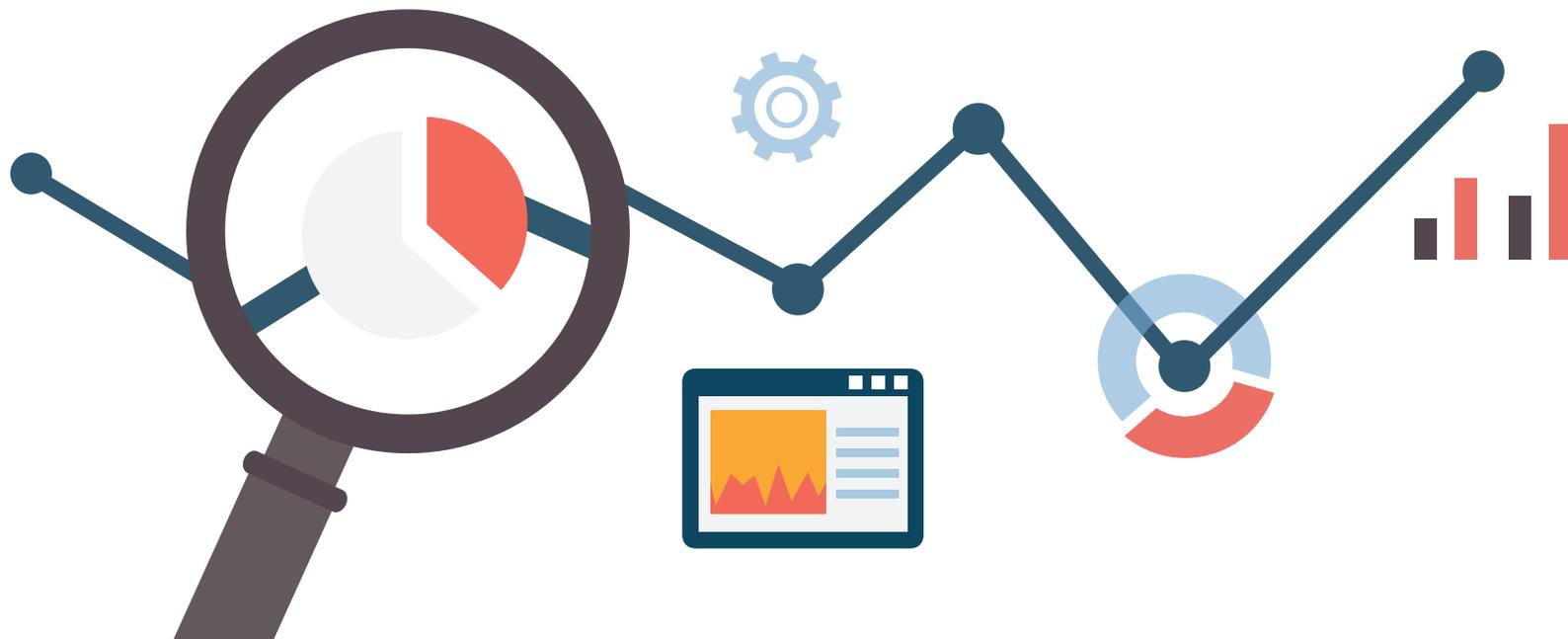
- The company had been through a series of mergers and had brought out several new products that the marketing team wanted to promote, but it did not have enough staff to do everything while upholding the company's high standards.
- Its website needed an upgrade to make it more visually appealing and provide a more responsive user experience on mobile devices.
- It also wanted to do more with social media, search engine optimization (SEO), email marketing, and content creation.

McGowan hired two Cleveland digital marketing agencies — Blue Star Design and Blackbird Digital — to upgrade its web presence and make its sites responsive on mobile devices. Blue Star Design specializes in branding, visual communications, and content marketing, while Blackbird focuses on advanced web development and digital marketing.

The two agencies met with McGowan to advise the team how to streamline and spruce up its web presence, but they also had a secondary goal: To encourage McGowan to fire up its content marketing strategy with inbound marketing enabled by software from HubSpot.

HubSpot helps companies integrate their customer-relationship-management (CRM) software with leads generated by their websites, email campaigns, and social media content. It's a robust package with comprehensive capabilities — but all that functionality takes a fair amount of time and effort that can be daunting to new customers.

And it's not just a technology challenge: Getting peak performance from HubSpot requires substantial expertise in SEO, page-rank algorithms, and keyword research.



## The stars align for McGowan

“Blue Star and Blackbird set up a meeting with McGowan to address its content and social media, hoping we could introduce HubSpot and inbound marketing,” recalls Julia Briggs, CEO of Blue Star Design. “We had just become fully certified HubSpot agencies and we knew they would be a fantastic candidate.”

Briggs and Blackbird founder, Pat Walsh, were discussing digital strategy with Suzanne Young, McGowan’s marketing director, when fate intervened:

“Halfway through that meeting, Suzanne mentioned that they had invested in HubSpot a year prior — but they didn’t understand it, didn’t have time to work with it, and they would be canceling it that week and signing on with a firm for content.

“Pat and I nearly leapt out of our chairs and yelled, ‘Noooooo!’” Briggs recalls.

### Solution: HubSpot, SEO, social, email, and more

McGowan’s marketing team gave Blue Star and Blackbird a chance to resuscitate its HubSpot efforts. Blue Star Design’s content marketing experts helped Young and her team optimize their marketing efforts in six key ways:

1. Understanding and implementing HubSpot workflows and “smart” forms to streamline and coordinate digital marketing efforts.
2. Integrating with Salesforce so every new lead finds its way into McGowan’s CRM systems — making it easier to target and segment marketing efforts and connect customers with the insurance services they need most.
3. Supercharging its keyword research and SEO skills.
4. Ramping up the company’s email newsletter.
5. Bolstering its social media efforts with targeted posts and engaging content.
6. Taking the strain off in-house content creators by assigning helpful, informative articles, blog posts, white papers, and other collateral to experienced freelancers.

“Suzanne understands the bits and pieces now, which allows her to make even more educated decisions,” Briggs says. “Letting us do the work has freed her up to find out how sales responds to online leads, and to discover how marketing can work with sales for the next initiative.”



## Results: Wider organic reach, more online leads

McGowan's highly specific insurance services make the company a great candidate for SEO. For instance, the company introduced one of the first coverage options for active-shooter scenarios, which are extremely rare (fortunately) but also likely to generate substantial news coverage. The news headlines, in turn, generate a lot of online search volume.

Blue Star's SEO advice helped McGowan garner impressive Google rankings in a short time span.

"Within four months of releasing our new Active Shooter Insurance Program — with the help of Blue Star — it landed at number one on Google search," says Young. "Due to our high search engine ranking, we got picked up and quoted in many national magazines. With all of Blue Star's inbound efforts, we have 98 keywords in the top 10 searches on Google."

According to data supplied by HubSpot, McGowan's websites have seen substantial traffic growth since 2015\*:

- 57% boost in visits from organic search
- 139% jump in visits from social media platforms
- Ten-fold surge in visits from email marketing
- 25% increase in overall site visits

Contacts generated by the campaign surged: In the first half of 2017, contacts from organic search leapt more than five-fold from all of 2016. Overall new contacts were up 89% in the same time frame.

All this adds up to increased engagement with McGowan's customers and more opportunities for sales people to reach out to those who are already interested in the company's products.

"Blue Star has been the driving force behind this campaign for us, from beginning to end," Young says. "They coordinate all our keywords for blogs, white papers, eBooks, etc. We could not have been so successful without them."

At the same time, the team at McGowan contributed to their success by committing to put their efforts into the inbound marketing philosophy.

"McGowan really understands the importance of good content," Briggs says. "They let us lead them in their journey, and by understanding what was necessary for success, they gained a return that exceeded their expectations."



\* Average site visits over the past 90 days



Blue Star is a creative agency offering graphic design, branding, marketing and web services, with plenty of experience in B2B, B2C, healthcare, nonprofit, technology, and EDU.

Anyone can claim great design and marketing services. We don't just sign a contract and get to work — we meet with our clients, get to know their business, get to know them personally, and get their perspectives. That's what sets us apart from the rest: our customized, personalized interactions and relationships. But that doesn't slow us down; if anything, it speeds the process along by minimizing missteps. We respect the art of business and consistently go above and beyond to meet our clients' objectives quickly, accurately and creatively. Our clients value us as their go-to team that they can rely on because we deliver, every time.

We are known for our exceptional customer service and attention to detail. We are easy to work with, and pride ourselves in understanding the nuances of our market segments. We are professional, accessible, attentive, responsible and fast. Simply put, Blue Star produces exceptional design at the speed of business.