

Five Questions With: Jennifer Bogutt

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Jennifer Bogutt is founder and president of The Jenn Lee Group, an East Greenwich-based marketing firm founded in 2003. (Lee is Bogutt's maiden name.) She talked with Providence Business News recently about virtual environments and the future of digital-age marketing.



PBN: How is your business holding up in light of the recession?

LEE: This year has been the most interesting year I have ever experienced as an advertising and marketing business owner. For one, the anxiety of owning a business in this economy has been overwhelmingly stressful for us. Not to mention how it has been affecting our clients businesses and media vendors. In trying to stay up to date with local, national and global news I am finding myself listening to only talk radio, watching only the news and reading only financial newspapers. I have had to literally force myself away from all news all the time to keep the right side/creative side of my brain muscle flexing ... we are a marketing firm after all!

WHILE JENNIFER BOGUTT has seen clients slow completion of projects due to the economy, she still feels the need to help them use the latest marketing tools, including mobile-phone based applications.

In business over the last six months I have seen jobs taking months to complete because the clients are stalling the project; I have interviewed candidates in their 70s who have come out of retirement due to the stock market; and "recession-proof" businesses, like the medical industry, being affected by the amount of joblessness. Thankfully, we have expanded our scope of services based on our client's requests, which has helped us survive this very difficult year.

PBN: You have said you see a lot of potential for using "virtual environments" to create more effective marketing. What is a virtual environment?

LEE: Wikipedia defines virtual reality (VR) as a technology which allows a user to interact with a computer-simulated environment. A virtual

environment is an online, Web-based, customer service tool that allows the user to create a computer-simulated environment. This “environment” typically is built with numerous attributes and options for the user to customize based on the goods being sold. Instead of seeing products listed in a catalog, the user can pick individual products in combination with other products to visually see the entire composition together. This tool can be used to customize clothing, sneakers, tabletops, kitchen cabinets, etc. It is perfect for any goods or service that have a permanent installation needing the customer to imagine the final outcome.

PBN: Could you give some examples?

LEE: Nike.com allows the user to pick a variety of different colors for a custom sneaker. Closetmaid.com allows the user to design their own closet based on their wall dimensions, storage products and wall unit types. Marvin windows allows the user to pick windows to be displayed based on a room style. The user then has the ability to insert their room dimensions, furniture, etc. to preview their virtual environment. Almost a year ago we produced a “virtual table top” for Fine Catering by Russell Morins and are currently in production of another virtual environment to be launched soon!

PBN: You have also talked about the potential of marketing with mobile phones. What do you see there? [i.e., real estate, QR codes]

LEE: The “text generation” is the next generation coming onto the scene with purchasing power. All businesses should look at how they can market themselves through mobile/hand-held devices to remain competitive. Once we have truly come out of our recession I believe that Realtors and people in the position to purchase a home will see a change in the traditional process of buying a home. Imagine driving by a home for sale and you want to get more information about the property. A text message number can be on the sign, which could allow the purchaser to get all the information they need about that home in a matter of minutes. Another interesting feature coming to the U.S. is the use of QR codes. Ralph Lauren used this mobile marketing technique during 2008’s fashion week. It is a matrix code that phones, with the appropriate reader, can recognize and download a visual coupon and link on their phone. This QR code works in a similar format to a bar code used at a grocery store. You scan it, take a picture of it with your phone and information is automatically displayed on your phone. It's great for distributing coupons, discounts, adding links to specific pages on your site and to track your marketing strategies by seeing the direct results from the display on the customer’s cell phone during the sale.

QR Codes are all the rage in Japan!

PBN: It seems as though the U.S. has been slower to embrace mobile marketing and buying technologies than other countries. Why do you think that is? Do you see it changing?

LEE: I think some areas in the U.S. are embracing mobile marketing. For example, metropolitan cities such as New York, where I spent almost 10 years, understand multicultural and international marketing challenges. I think we see more of this in these areas because the people living and working in such a global city must have a phone that can function while traveling internationally. Razor Fish, a top advertising agency has expressed in their digital outlook report for 2009 that "this year, mobile will get smarter." Because we are all becoming "more global," programs and applications are being developed by design architects that have a reach within the U.S. and abroad. Applications for the phone are constantly being upgraded and developed to increase the scope of how we get, retrieve and process all types of information. As a marketing firm we must stay abreast of the next big "boom" in hand-held advertising and marketing so that our clients can benefit from being first before it becomes mainstream, therefore keeping their marketing strategies truly on the cutting edge.