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Inside Outsourcing™



INTERVIEWED BY LARRY JANIS

Inside with:

Brenna L. Garratt

CEO, The Delve Group, Inc.

The Delve Group creates, implements, and manages brands that deliver measurable results for business services companies. We actively foster brands that create real and perceived market leadership, generating credibility that results in increased interest from prospective clients, employees, and business partners. Beyond facilitating the building of new relationships, improving revenue growth opportunities, and easing the recruitment and retention of talent, our success is measured by advancing the enterprise value of our clients' businesses. Headquartered in New York City, we have clients located in the US and around the world.



LJ: Your firm focuses on Brand Development, would you give us an overview of what your firm does?

BG: At Delve, we strongly believe that brand development is business development. We create, launch and manage brands that deliver measurable results for business-services companies. Through the active stewardship of brands that create real and perceived market leadership, we improve the likelihood of market success for our clients.

A strong brand is more than a beautiful logo or a catchy tagline. A brand is a fundamental promise of the experience that stakeholders will have if they choose to interact with a company. Brand tells your internal and external audiences – including clients, employees, partners and investors – who you are and what you stand for. It is the story of why you exist and what it will be like to work with you. It is told through every interaction both direct and indirect – from the people you hire to the design of your website to the words you use when answering an RFP. It is your reputation, your credibility and, ultimately, your most powerful sales tool.

Brand strategy is business strategy, and Delve works closely with its clients to identify what relevant niche or specialized positioning they can sustainably own. We focus on what attributes differentiate our clients from their competitive set and how best to communicate to create a highly visible perception of market leadership. We facilitate the building of new relationships, improve revenue growth opportunities, and ease the recruitment and retention of talent. Overall, our success is measured by advancing the enterprise value of our clients' businesses.

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FROM THE EDITOR

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Inside Outsourcing's goal is to provide you with articles of interest and with a forum for the exchange of information in this rapidly evolving industry.

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LJ: You have worked with several BPO providers, how has branding changed these firms?

BG: Each company has unique challenges when initiating a branding exercise, so our work is customized to enable the change that is most desired by our clients. However, there are common themes that resonate throughout all of our client engagements, such as a need for:

- Increased market awareness
- A deliberate and compelling position amongst competition
- Improved ability to navigate (and shorten) complex sales cycles
- Faster speed to market
- Being an employer of choice – able to attract and retain top talent
- A clear strategic platform that enables a more consistent and effective pursuit of growth opportunities and facilitates logical decision-making

A strong brand allows for alignment around a common goal internally and helps to define a company externally. By maintaining a clear and consistent brand – walking the talk – a company can achieve real business outcomes.

Through our brand-building process, our clients have been able to improve market share, secure higher margins, attain more powerful negotiating positions, expand more effectively, and increase their exit-strategy options.

We guided one client's brand from a business plan to having 37% market share and being invited to bid on every large-scale deal proposed at the time. Other clients have remarked that we've reduced their operating costs by creating and executing more effective go-to-market activities. We've had clients tell us that due to the brand awareness we created, they became an attractive acquisition target. We even had one company let us know that a smaller firm approached them, wanting to become a part of their business and new brand!

It's important to note that each client measures success differently depending on their challenges going into this process. Just as each brand promise should be differentiated, the business outcomes from the branding process itself will be unique to each company.

LJ: What are the challenges in the BPO sectors moving forward?

BG: It is an interesting space these days, primarily because it has become much more than standard business process outsourcing. The more expertise outsourcing companies acquire, the more they evolve from straightforward tasks toward specialized, mission-critical outsourced services.

Building Trust: One of the most pressing issues for any business-services company is achieving the trust of their clients and prospective clients. While trust is not bestowed to an outsourcing provider simply through the brand, it is a critical part of building the reputation and credibility that directly affects the development of relationships.



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Ultimately, outsourcing firms need to secure trust through performance, but a solid brand position and strategy can accelerate the transfer of trust and impact perceptions of expertise. And when there are hiccups along the way – and there always are – if a provider has a strong sense of good will and support from its clients, it will navigate these rough moments more successfully.

Cultural Fit: These days, cultural fit is one of the top criteria that buyers consider when assessing BPO providers. The assessment of something as intangible as an outsourcing provider’s culture is highly influenced by their brand experience – what type of people providers select to represent them in meetings, what they say, how they say it and how that message is reflected in materials. Through a well-executed brand strategy, providers can affect how people perceive their culture, ensuring a better fit in the long run.

Playing to Your Strengths: Another key issue that many BPO providers have is the urge to be all things to all people. Everyone seems to be clamoring to engage the middle market. Everyone knows that the foot-in-the-door technique can often be the most successful way to grow your business. The industry is rife with “me-too” plays. But, as the saying goes, “Those who stand for nothing fall for anything.” If a provider doesn’t have a clear understanding of its strengths and differentiation in the market, it cannot have a clear understanding of an ideal client engagement. Truly defining who you are, not only helps guide companies when approaching clients, but can also facilitate prospective clients self-selecting and approaching you first.

LJ: How would you compare the onshore versus the offshore providers in terms of branding themselves in the US market?

BG: Both offshore and onshore providers face a similar branding challenge of keeping up with changing market dynamics without losing the core of who they are and what they stand for.

Both on- and offshore providers are faced with the challenge of being seen as true experts and advisors, no longer as cost-plays focused on commodity work. While cost-saving is always an objective when a company decides to outsource a business function, it’s no longer just about “lift and shift”. More and more companies are focusing on finding business partners who will improve efficiencies and maximize specialized knowledge to advance operations overall.

This opportunity to position as a strategic partner is good for all providers of outsourcing services, but offshore providers have a larger mountain to climb when overcoming negative perceptions of being simply low-cost options, not to mention a lot of the negative media attention that offshoring has received over the last few years. Historically, offshore providers have focused on the pricing advantages of their market position as their foot-in-the-door technique. But with the decreasing value of the dollar, the opportunity for immediate cost-savings is decreasing as well. Often times, offshore providers need to work twice as hard to secure their position as strategic partners.



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Another challenge we see for offshore providers is gaining greater market awareness with target US audiences. With relationships being increasingly important, there is an added challenge for offshore providers to build the needed connections abroad. Great brands rarely fail because of poor strategy, but rather poor implementation and management. We have seen many providers not adequately budget for their go-to-market activities and the stewardship of their brands overseas.

LJ: If you were advising a start-up firm in business services, what are the top five items they should focus on?

BG: Further underlining that brand development is business development, we think this advice is probably good for any type of business in any stage of growth.

Forget About B2B. No business actually sells to another business and people are not defined by their job functions. Marketers tend to think that B2B is somehow fundamentally different than B2C, but it's not. At the end of the day, people sell to people and we all want to be engaged, invigorated and challenged on an intellectual and emotional level when we buy.

Be an Exhibitionist. In today's world, it's vital to stand strong for something important. Making incremental improvements to services or products, reducing client costs, being dependable – these things are table stakes. Of course, you need to be better than the other alternatives in order to make it into the consideration set, but it's not enough to make you stand out. In order to lead the market, you must have a point of view and you must holler it from rooftops for people to take notice.

Look at Your Client's Navel. Entrepreneurs are passionate, inspirational and, most likely, obsessed with their widgets. They talk potential, vision, specs – and usually claim that they “don't really have any competitors.” The truth is, from the client point of view, any alternative to purchasing your services (including buying nothing) should be considered a competitor that you need to position against. And, ultimately, a client doesn't have to intimately understand HOW you do things, they do need to understand WHAT you will do for their business – the end results. So stop gazing at your own navel and start viewing the world from your targets' point of view.

Slip into Something Uncomfortable. Nothing truly revolutionary ever feels comfortable at first. While it's not necessary to always be operating in a state of discomfort, if you find you haven't gone someplace odd or new in a while, grab that intellectual passport and book passage. Better yet, take some valued employees, client partners or trusted advisors along for the ride.

Democracy Kills. We're all for it in political parties, but when it comes to making organizational decisions, it can easily become the nemesis of speed, creativity and daring. There are other ways to bring people along in



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a positive way: socialize ideas and get individual buy-in rather than giving each individual a vote. Great ideas can gain consensus, but they need not be – and generally are not – arrived at or generated by consensus.

LJ: What has made you successful?

BG: First, we practice what we preach. If you look at our five items from the previous answer, we live those every day at Delve.

Our love is branding business-services companies. We have tons of heart for the work, and we are very good at it. Almost all of our new business comes from repeat clients or referrals from our past clients to their business colleagues and friends.

Communication is critical for us, and we believe it to be our job to tell you the truth rather than what you might want to hear. It's also our job to bring clients to that sometimes-uncomfortable place that can launch a new movement. We have expertise in helping people and organizations make the journey from an amazing idea to its ideal execution. But it's really our incredibly talented team of passionate business-branding specialists that spells success for our clients and for Delve.



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