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Online growth boosts ARAnet business

by Meleah Maynard Special to Finance & Commerce

There's been a lot of talk about how advertising has suffered because of the faltering economy over the past several years, but Scott Severson wasn't listening.

Since becoming president of Hopkins-based ARAnet in 2006, Severson has increased the revenue of the privately held company, which develops and provides leading digital marketing tools, by 500 percent.

When Severson was recruited to take the helm of ARAnet, the firm was already known for helping build the brands of many high-profile companies, including General Mills, Bank of America, Microsoft, Hormel and Subaru. In fact, it was the company's track record — along with its products and the fact that most everyone shared the same values — that lured him aboard. Since then, the 20-year marketing veteran has built on ARAnet's previous success by developing new strategies for delivering marketing messages in the digital age.

By moving ARAcontent — feature articles that promote clients' brands — from print-based newspapers and magazines to the Web, Severson has revitalized the company's flagship product. Content is provided to publications that subscribe to ARAcontent free of charge.

"Our reach is turning more and more on line every day and our content feeds provide Web site owners with an ongoing stream of high-quality content that's of interest to their readers," Severson explains, adding that the content creates increased ad sale opportunities for publishers while increasing the search engine optimization ranking of clients' Web sites.

Severson has also helped ARAnet turn its experimental product, Adfusion, into an award-winning success that accounts for 75 percent of the company's revenue. Billed as a sophisticated, next-generation online delivery tool, Adfusion combines the benefits of cost-per-click advertising with content-rich articles, giving marketers an effective, credible way to direct motivated, qualified visitors to their landing pages.



Advertisement

"Where all other online advertising is focused on selling space around content, Adfusion is unique because we let our advertisers become the content," Severson explains, adding that Adfusion was recently expanded to international audiences in the United Kingdom. "We have significant infrastructure and proprietary algorithms that help Adfusion outperform other forms of online advertising."

Before joining ARAnet, Severson, who was recruited for his position as president, spent nearly a decade as director of Internet business for Minnetonka-based North American Membership Group, which combines membership, publishing and merchandise marketing.

Before that he worked for companies in Minnesota and California selling commercial printing, database and direct mail services. A self-described "tech geek" who sold computers while still in high school, Severson says he chose his career path by being "...one of those people who naturally gravitated towards sales and marketing."

During Severson's tenure as president, ARAnet has grown from 35 to 50 employees. Unwilling to take too much of the credit for this, he cites products that generate results for clients and a culture centered on setting and achieving goals as the biggest reasons for the company's success.

"We have products that generate results for our clients in a way that is incredibly relevant, measurable and effective," he says. "It's this combination of the right culture and the right products that have really catapulted our growth over the last couple of years."

Plans for the future include growing revenue, enhancing current products and developing new ones, as well as creating growth opportunities for employees, Severson says.

"I love what I do and I see tremendous opportunity to continue to grow the company," Severson says. "It's really exciting to be able to have an idea, implement it and quickly see it have a positive impact on the business. So right now I plan to continue to work with my team and help ARAnet grow rapidly and innovate."

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