

Company Profile: Digital Air Strike

By Chris Gilfillan



Alexi Venneri cares deeply about how her clients spend their marketing money.

And she's focused on three words — return on investment.

That's why she founded Digital Air Strike, a company that leverages social media for its clients.

"They just didn't know how to track [marketing return on investment]," Venneri said, "And they would believe the ad agency or that vendor or whatever. They just hoped they saw more business. Hope is not a strategy."

So, Venneri built analytical tools for clients to utilize all the online social platforms — like Angie's List or Yelp.

And they're focused solely on the social media, not typical TV, radio or print buys.

"We've been able to show, without a doubt, more ROI than I've ever seen from literally any other advertising medium in all of my years in marketing, because it's so cost effective, but it's also easy to track."

Venneri comes at this with experience.

More than a decade ago she was the director of guest relations for the Seattle Mariners, just after the team completed Safeco Field. Then the team was expanding technology in the ballpark. But, a startup — Who's Calling — lured her away.

"Everyone thought I was insane to leave the baseball team to go work at a startup, but it really intrigued me," she said. "So I think I've always been drawn to technology and how you can find new ways to connect with consumers. That's always been the core of any marketer."

Eventually, after helping to grow that business she took on marketing roles with DealerTrack, which eventually went public, and then became president at Blue Flame 6, where she helped automotive dealers nationwide with advertising.

Now, after six years at Digital Air Strike, the company went from a kitchen table to doing more than \$30 million in revenue and having more than 170 full-time employees, despite opening its doors just after the Recession.

"We're just that steady little engine that could; we just keep growing," she said. "And I do think it's because we've got a great solution and everyone is focused on showing value."

And that value comes in the form of managing the clients' online presence, whether that means responding on Twitter or replying on behalf of the firm to respond to negative reviews.

"We're really just trying to make them look good online and to be successful and to convert those leads into sales for them," Venneri said.

And, while the company built from a list of clients in the automotive sector, she said now they're branching out to other sectors. But, she said they're staying focused on their wheelhouse — social media advertising.

"There's not a lot of people doing what we're doing," she said. "What we find is there's traditional agencies trying to — the best word is probably — dabble in social media. They have no idea how to monetize it because they're used to huge commissions on media buys. For us, we can work with someone for a thousand a month, and give them a lot, issue a lot of tangible ROI, versus trying to talk them into a thirty or forty grand media buy."

That passion for the clients, she said, has trickled down to her staff, giving her associates the title of client advocates.

And since she's held the title of chief marketing officer at companies before, she knows what it's like to spend on marketing.

"In a lot of ways I was that client trying to know how to spend my budget," she said. "I've been in those shoes for so long that I know it's tough. And I think I just have empathy for anybody."

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