

St. Paul Pioneer Press

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Open for Business: BridgeWater Consulting, LLC

Owners: Robin Hicks, Meredith Hinke, Kathy Snell

Type of business: Virtual firm that provides outsourced strategic marketing and communications services.

Number of employees: The team members are contractors.

Location: Virtual business, but we all work from home offices around the Twin Cities.

Contact Information: 952-905-0030, Pete Snell, Business Development Associate

Tell us what your business does. We provide outsourced marketing and communications services to businesses of all sizes. Our services cover strategic planning and execution of marketing plans, media and public relations, branding, graphic design and materials production, social networking and new media, Web site development, copy writing, competitive research and crisis communications.

Why are you launching it now? We have seen the demand for outsourced services increase over the past couple of years as small business ownership is on the rise and professional services firms realize the need to market to remain competitive. Companies are downsizing to weather the turbulent economic times, but know they must continue to market to remain competitive, so utilizing an outsourced virtual firm is often the perfect solution to bridge them until they have adequate in-house staffing or experience comfortable growth.

Where did you get the idea for your business? We all have collaborated on clients in the past few years while working with different marketing consulting firms and knew each other's strengths and work styles. We have experienced the increased need for outsourced marketing services and decided to combine our individual areas of expertise.



From left to right are BridgeWater Consulting's partners Robin Hicks, Meredith Hinke, and Kathy Snell.

How did you develop your business plan? By working in the industry for years and determining what works best for the client and the firm. We relied on our collective experience to develop the most effective plan, which will change as marketplace trends change.

How do you see current economic conditions affecting your business? The uneasy economy is actually suited for our business as more companies are outsourcing or entrepreneurs are starting new businesses as a result of downsizing and they need help with planning and executing to get the business off the ground.

What makes your business unique? The climate today is no longer business as usual and that goes for our firm. We are a virtual business and utilize the latest technologies to communicate with our clients and each other. We have little overhead and are able to pass these benefits on to the client. Capitalizing on time saved by conducting virtual meetings, sharing our desktops, utilizing our Blackberries and using Skype for Webcam meetings makes us very efficient and effective on behalf of our clients.

What was the biggest obstacle you had to overcome to get this business going? Combining consulting practices into one firm and bringing our individual clients with us to the new firm. We recognize that business development can be the biggest challenge for a new business.

How did you overcome the obstacle? By selling our clients on the added value they will receive from expanded services and a larger team of consultants.

What will tell you the business is successful? Client satisfaction is the bare minimum, so when they recommend us to colleagues and friends, we'll know we've achieved success.