



## The Most Powerful Name in Corporate News and Information

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TANIS COMMUNICATIONS, INC.

## Marketing, PR and Communication Services for Technology Companies



**Nikki Tanis - President**

A recent addition to the Inc. 5000 fastest growing private companies list, Tanis is an award-winning marketing, PR and communications services firm offering fully integrated communications programs that engage, inform, inspire and connect clients with their most important stakeholders.

The Silicon Valley is changing the world with innovation. Technical geniuses need marketing geniuses to bring their innovations to life, engage customers, employees and shareholders. Tanis Communications delivers the best of both worlds – a very experienced and creative marketing and communications team to serve like an in-house organization, with the flexibility and leverage of an outside agency.

### **CEOCFO: Ms. Tanis, what is Tanis Communications?**

**Ms. Tanis:** Tanis is a marketing, PR and communications services firm. We are based in San Jose, California and we serve primarily technology companies here in the Silicon Valley.

### **CEOCFO: Why do you like working with technology companies and was it by design or opportunistic?**

**Ms. Tanis:** I guess that depends on how far back in history you go. Originally, I was a broadcast journalism major and aspired to be an on-air reporter for television news. Between college and getting that TV job, I moved back home to the Silicon Valley, where my parents lived and took a job in the communications department at a technology company. I very quickly realized that getting a job as a reporter would require moving to much smaller markets, and would not pay quite as well initially as jobs in technology marketing. Then I figured out I was quite good at the kind of storytelling, messaging and positioning needed to make a very technical product or company relevant to their many target audiences. So here I am 20+ years later... still loving the world of technology marketing and communications.

### **CEOCFO: What types of companies do you work with most often, is it with people who are launching more products, startups or across the board?**

**Ms. Tanis:** We now serve companies of all sizes – from Fortune 100 companies to stealth-mode start-ups. Initially, my vision for the agency was that we would bring startups the very strategic and integrated approach to communications that the larger companies enjoy with their in-house organizations. When I started the agency the first time in the 90s, the Valley was filled with VC-backed start-ups. Their cash spend was focused on the engineering resources needed to get their products developed and ready to go to market. So building out very experienced and senior go-to-market teams in-house was a luxury they couldn't afford. So we built a business providing those companies with a fully outsourced solution for PR and marketing communications in a way that allowed them to focus on product development, while tapping into our experienced team to manage their go-to-market strategy. They could use a single budget and shift their priorities as needed – from honing their brand and messaging; to building out their web presence; to launching the product through PR channels; to developing the associated collateral and lead generation programs needed to kick start the sales process. More recently, we are seeing the same value proposition become a compelling alternative for larger companies as well. For example, they may have a major initiative like a merger or an acquisition that requires fully integrated external and internal communications. In this instance, you have one announcement, one story, one set of key messages, and a huge number of target audiences to reach. It is critical for those communications to be managed cohesively. Other times we will have a client who has a fabulous in-house organization, but is planning a major initiative or a product launch and their internal team needs additional bandwidth to

handle the activities. In those cases, they tap into Tanis as an extension of their internal team to help bring that product to market. Our flexibility and ability to cater to the specific needs of every client is something that sets us apart.

**“Our clients are our biggest fans -- they go to sleep knowing that we care as much as they do to get the work done right and they trust us.” - Nikki Tanis**

**CEOCFO: *What do you understand fundamentally about communications that perhaps others recognize?***

**Ms. Tanis:** To answer that question I think it is helpful to look at how our industry has evolved over time. In the past, whether technology companies had an internal organization or not, programs were organized by function. For example, you would have a PR agency or internal PR team handling media relations and writing press releases. You would have a web development firm or internal team that focused on web development, and likely completely different resources would implement financial communications or employee communications. Someone, either the director of marketing or CMO, or even the CEO depending on company size and scope, would then have to drive consistent strategy and message development across all of those different firms and organizations. But those disciplines are now converging as the line blurs between paid, owned and earned media. And companies are starting to control their own voice and their own content. So the siloed approach to service delivery is no longer appropriate to the ways that customers engage with brands. What I think is unique about Tanis is that we take a look at what the company is trying to achieve -- what are the messages and the target audiences that are going to help the company achieve that goal. Then we create compelling content to deliver against those objectives. Sometimes it will be a pitch to a reporter and sometimes it will be a blog post. Other times, it could be basic content marketing where we write a white paper and then conduct a lead generation program to get the content of that white paper out to the target audience. I think that, in a nutshell, what we bring is the ability to tailor a program to the objective of the company and then execute it. That model is very different than other firms who are very specialized in a particular area.

**CEOCFO: *How do you keep up with the new trends; how do you know what is likely to stick around and may need to be incorporated in what you are doing?***

**Ms. Tanis:** I wish we had a crystal ball, but unfortunately we do not always know what new trend is going to stick ahead of time. What keeps me up at night is the fact that the marketing world is changing so dramatically. With native advertising and content marketing tools and analytics, the ability for companies to track customers through all these different touch points, has become very sophisticated. So, we have institutionalized a culture of continuous learning to ensure we stay on top of what is going on. First of all, because we are an agency, I think we have broader exposure than some in-house people do. We have fifteen clients right now, so we see what fifteen companies are doing rather than just a single employer. And we try to not only advise our clients, but also to learn from them. That combination works really well in a rapidly changing marketplace. We also learn from each other through an internal session we call First Friday (held on the first Friday of every month.) One of our internal or external team members will present to the whole team on a topic of interest – perhaps they are an expert on a particular subject, such as Google’s recent changes that will affect SEO. Or they just returned from a seminar, or learned something interesting from a peer or a client. By presenting to the whole team we can bring together a diverse set of skills and expertise and everyone learns something. Finally we are rabid readers and leverage social media to follow the great thinkers in our industry. So far this culture has served us very well.

**CEOCFO: *When you are hiring what intangibles are important for you?***

**Ms. Tanis:** I look for people that care passionately about the outcomes that matter to our clients and who have the emotional intelligence to relate well to a broad range of personalities and people. While it is certainly important for people to have the skills and the experience, you can fairly easily interview and check references for that. And you can fill any gaps with training and mentoring. But there are attributes you can’t teach someone. Those traits are part of their DNA and they are either there or they’re not. We look for the people who will double check that a press release or blog post is right at 9:00pm - just because they care, not because they were asked to. Or someone who proactively offers to fix a problem or recommends a better way to go, because they care, deeply, about the work. We look for people with the grace, intelligence and professionalism to help our clients get to the right answer so they can be heroes within their own organizations. The results really need to matter to them. This is very important because our

clients rely on us very heavily. Our clients are our biggest fans -- they go to sleep knowing that we care as much as they do to get the work done right and they trust us. These characteristics are hard to interview for, but so far I think we have done well.

**CEOCFO: *What is next for Tanis?***

**Ms. Tanis:** We are fascinated by the evolution of analytics across the integration of communications capabilities. In the past, results have been measured by function within a company's marketing organization. So a PR agency communicated results to the PR team, the web team shared website analytics, online marketing measured demand generation and all that was sent to the marketing team. And it was the marketing team's responsibility to make sense of the results. I am really fascinated by the opportunity to bring this disparate view together and achieve incredible leverage. We would take a single piece of content or storyline and drive that content across all target audiences through earned, owned, paid and shared media. Using automated tools and sophisticated analytics, we will track where, how and why that content was reviewed, who interacted with it with what level of engagement, and where in the sales process they accessed it. Those kinds of analytics are happening today with advertising and digital marketing, but I do not think they are as central to traditional PR. And I believe they are virtually untapped in the fields of employee communications or shareholder relations. It is going to be the wave of the future and it is something we are really looking at...how to fully achieve this leverage and integrate this holistic measurement for our clients moving forward.

**CEOCFO: *When you are talking with a potential client do they sense the difference at Tanis and is there an "aha" moment?***

**Ms. Tanis:** Absolutely. It is when we roll up our sleeves and debate their product positioning, marketing and corporate strategy with them. Most of us have been around for a long time and we've been in very senior positions inside technology companies, so we intuitively understand their business, their technology challenges and their organizational challenges. We know what is and what is not going to help them get to where they need to go. When we can have a discussion with a CMO at that level, it absolutely differentiates us from other firms.

**CEOCFO: *How is business these days?***

**Ms. Tanis:** Business is great! We are very proud of the fact that we've won several awards this year, as well as being identified by the Inc. 5000 as one of the fastest growing private companies in America. The awards are really important because they are peer-reviewed awards, meaning our peers looked at our results and are acknowledging the quality of our work.

**CEOCFO: *How do you keep the momentum?***

**Ms. Tanis:** We have disciplined processes across the board -- everything from our forecasting process, so we can understand when things are dipping versus growing, to our processes that help us manage resource allocation. We even have processes that guide quality of work, client interactions and status reporting. As we grow, we have to evolve how we operate so we can scale the business while maintaining a high quality of work and a happy workforce. Having those processes allows us to fix whatever problem arises before it affects the business. I think it is important to have the discipline to pay attention to all aspects of the business and make sure it is all clicking.

**CEOCFO: *Would you tell us about your worldwide capabilities?***

**Ms. Tanis:** We partner with agencies for worldwide programs. In terms of external communications, most of our clients are focused, at least so far, on North America and Asia Pacific. When we manage global employee communications for international clients, their local human resources team generally acts as an extension of our team to handle projects there. For PR, we partner with some excellent firms that have great capabilities in Japan, China, Taiwan and Korea as well as throughout Europe.

**CEOCFO: *What is an example of a program that you developed that is outside the box and represents the thinking of Tanis?***

**Ms. Tanis:** We have a client called Crossbar that is a flash memory technology company (their website is crossbar-inc.com.) They are a venture capital backed startup that came to us last year looking for help coming out of stealth

mode. We initially prepared a full corporate communications plan where, in partnership with them, we laid out their objectives, their overall strategies and target audiences, messaging and narratives, and how we would measure success. As a result of that planning process, we then reengaged with them in the spring of this year, launching the company in August. We handled everything - brand strategy and messaging tailored to each target audience, web development and all the PR activities related to the launch. We really nailed a compelling story that significantly amplified their message. The press coverage on their website shows what a phenomenal response we got for a very technical company. Even though it was a very technical story, we were able to elevate it in such a way as to make it relevant to a broad number of people and companies. They had press coverage on CNBC and the local CBS station, and in everything from Time Magazine, the Wall Street Journal and Fast Company, to the technical trade publications that traditionally cover this kind of news announcement. Crossbar had a couple of goals in mind and one was to help grease the skids for introductions to potential partners and customers. What happened was that instead of just greasing the skids, Crossbar was inundated by phone calls and people were knocking on their door wanting to talk to them. The announcement was beyond successful from that perspective.

**CEOCFO: *Why pay attention to Tanis Communications?***

**Ms. Tanis:** We are one of only a handful of agencies that can effectively deliver both the strategic insight needed to develop an integrated communications plan, and then execute it leveraging a range of communications media to influence their customers in a way that benefits their business.

**CEOCFO: *Final thoughts?***

**Ms. Tanis:** Culturally, our team has a huge desire to excel. You will not find an agency that cares more than we do about the outcome for our customers, and you will see that validated by the testimonials on our website.

**BIO:** Nikki Tanis, President of Tanis Communications, has 20+ years experience creating and implementing a broad range of strategic communications, PR and marketing programs for technology companies. Passionate about building a powerful and positive image for her clients, Nikki has led Tanis Communications to become a respected and fast growing Silicon Valley corporate marketing consultancy, serving a diverse set of high technology companies with a breadth of integrated communications, PR and marketing services. Previously, Nikki was Corporate Vice President, Corporate Marketing and Communications at Spansion, Inc., a global, publicly traded Flash memory leader, with \$2.5 billion in revenue and over 9,000 employees. She has also held management positions in corporate communications marketing at companies including S3, NEC Electronics and Signetics. Nikki holds a bachelor's degree in journalism with a minor in psychology from San Diego State University.



TANIS COMMUNICATIONS, INC.

**75 East Santa Clara Street, Suite 1250  
San Jose, CA 95113  
408-295-4309  
[www.taniscomm.com](http://www.taniscomm.com)**