



Marketing Consultants for the Aviation Industry



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ABCI

CEO CFO: Ms. Williams, what is the idea behind Aviation Business Consultants International?

Ms. Williams: We actually got started working in the aviation industry doing direct response marketing. That is because we found that most of the marketing in aviation was what we called “random acts of marketing.” People would go to a trade show or buy an ad in a magazine; they would not really measure the effectiveness of what they were doing. They were spending much more money than needed and not getting the results they should. We thought we could do better, so we started ABCI, doing what we call direct response marketing for the aviation industry.

CEO CFO: What are some of the challenges unique to the industry?

Ms. Williams: Some of the challenges are that the sales cycle is longer than it is, shall we say, in the “rest of the world.” Aviation is very regulated and very risk averse. Whatever people are currently doing, it is very difficult to get them to consider a new solution or change their behavior. It takes a longer time and more “touches” and a great deal more information to convert a prospect to a customer. There is a longer time frame and much more involvement on the part of the sales and marketing folks.

CEO CFO: Are you working for companies that are selling planes, mechanics services or flight services? What areas do you touch on?

Ms. Williams: All of the above. We work for clients who sell anything and everything to people in the aviation industry. Doctors, lawyers, component manufacturers, insurance, software, charter services, FBOs, MROs, airplane brokers, lessons; pretty much anything and everything.

CEO CFO: Are there segments of the industry that realize they should be looking for a specialist such as ABCI?

Ms. Williams: Back in 2006, people did not realize there was anything to do but what they had been doing, which was basically buying an ad in a magazine or showing up at a trade show. They did what they had always done and that had always been successful for them, until the markets turned in the early 2000s when things that had been working, suddenly stopped working.

Prior to about 2005, you could market badly and still get good results when the market was good. However, in a more challenging market you have to be good at what you do and you have to be competitive in order to succeed. I think the industry had been a victim of its own success in that way, because they had not realized that there was a better way to do things, because what they had always been doing was working. There was money lying in the streets you just have to go pick it up and that worked pretty well until bottom dropped out of the market and suddenly aviation companies became much more aware of and accountable for every dollar they spent.

CEO CFO: Would you walk us through a couple of engagements?

Ms. Williams: We had a broker that sells used business jets. They contacted us, actually several years ago, for the first time. They liked what they heard. It made sense to them. It seemed to solve many of the issues they had. At first they did not hire us as a consultant.

They had us do an analysis, or “Marketing Flight Plan” for them, that they intended to use as a job description so they could hire an in-house staff member to perform the functions we recommended. They were very open about it.

Some of the things that we suggested were to revise their website, add an information guide as a lead generation tool - people could download it in exchange for their contact information. We recommended several other things; some trade show appearances and some advertising and things like that.

After about eight months of recruiting for a marketing position to manage all of those pieces and fill all of those roles; they came back to us and said, “We were not able to find anyone that we could hire as an internal team member, so we will just hire you guys.”

We worked with them very successfully for a long time after that.

We talked them into using Facebook. They were one of the first jet brokers that was displaying their planes on Facebook, which was unorthodox – it was not seen as a very credible way of doing business in that industry. However, they ended up making new sales from someone that they met through their Facebook presence. That was a pioneering activity that turned their opinion around. Now, of course, many other folks in the industry are advertising on Facebook.

As another example, lets talk about one of the flight schools that engaged ABCI. Again, it was a long sale cycle for us, because it took a long time for them to commit to our process. We worked with them for several months. They used many of the suggestions, some they did not. We ended up parting ways for about six months. They tried some things on their own and then came back to us after about six months of trying some things on their own.

They said, “We are a whole lot more successful with you than without you.” Again, the industry is kind of resistant, I would say, to using an outside marketing agency. They really want to use people internally, but the folks that have been with us for a while learned that it is easier to use an agency that has the economies to scale and has the expertise, rather than trying to teach someone in house and then sending them to several expensive seminars, paying for research, and buying or subscribing to several of these software tools and all of the other overhead involved.

“Because we understand the industry and we take the time to understand our members and their objectives, we’re in a great position to recommend the best marketing strategies and positioning, but also to see opportunities and suggest partnerships and joint marketing agreements that benefit everyone.” - Paula Williams

CEOFCO: *How have you been able to assemble the talent you need in all of the different arenas to provide a complete offering?*

Ms. Williams: It has taken us a long time! We have built over time. We started out doing much of the work ourselves, of course. John Williams is my husband and we started the company together in 2006. We used to do most the work ourselves. We did all of the writing. We did all of the search engine optimization. We are very technical people. We came from information technology and very technical backgrounds. However, as we have grown and things have become more technical, we have discovered that those are things that specialty companies and experts that we trust and that we have worked with in our previous life in the finance and education industries and so on. We have folks that we like and trust that do search engine optimization for us. We outsource a lot of the writing to freelance copywriters in the industry and we have good relationships with them and know who would be a great copywriter for any particular job. Each client has a different look and feel, so we often hire a different artist for each different job. We have a cartoon artist that builds an educational cartoon to very simply explain some of their more complex concepts in a funny way that really gets attention, simplifies things, and helps people engage with our clients.

CEOFCO: *How do you stay on top of the regulatory issues in the industry and the trends in marketing?*

Ms. Williams: We are most concerned with the trends and so on in marketing. This is a divide and conquer situation, where we are really good partners with our client companies. We have what we call a marketing master class, where our members help each other. They are in all different kinds of businesses that are not necessarily directly competing with one another. We have a private Facebook group where our members can communicate with one another about new legislation or new developments in technology and the industry. Our focus, of course, is the marketing changes. If something changes with Google it is our responsibility to make sure that we understand that and apply that directly for all of our clients. However, if something changes in, for instance, drone legislation or something like that, some of our clients are going to be affected and others are not. Therefore, we let them help one another, because that is not directly marketing related. That is not really our show, so we let the experts handle the things that they are expert at.

CEOFCO: *What have you learned over time? How do you provide better service today than three or four years ago?*

Ms. Williams: We have found experts in different areas, as an example, I have mentioned search engine optimization. We used to do all of that ourselves, but there are people who are so much better at it because that is all they do. We have

learned is to let experts handle their area of expertise. Our main value is in building and connecting and coordinating that team of people that do this work for each other.

CEOFCO: *Are there many companies that have entered the marketing side as you have?*

Ms. Williams: I think there are four companies that specialize in marketing for the aviation industry. The difference between them is that we are much more participatory, meaning that our clients participate with us and become more of a long term partner. We do not just build a brochure or website for them and then let them fend for themselves. We work with our members for a very long time. We do not really have customers, we have members that become part of our group and participate with us in their marketing.

CEOFCO: *Do your members sometimes work with each other? Do they work through you or through the membership to find potential partners or suppliers?*

Ms. Williams: Absolutely! One of the biggest values that we can offer is helping people form relationships, mentorships, joint marketing agreements and so on.

Because we understand the industry and we take the time to understand our members and their objectives, we're in a great position to recommend the best marketing strategies and positioning, but also to see opportunities and suggest partnerships and joint marketing agreements that benefit everyone.

I just spoke this morning with a young gentleman who has an interest in a different part of the industry than he is currently working in. He is very young and very good at social media. We have another member who happens to know the area of aviation and has many connections in that area, but he is not very good at social media. We suggested that connection could be very profitable for both of them. That is an example that showed up this morning, where we will make an introduction and some suggestions and see where it goes. That is really where the magic happens. It is those connections.

CEOFCO: *What surprised you as the company has grown and evolved?*

Ms. Williams: I thought it would be easier! In 2006 my grand vision was to be the only direct response, digital, mostly online marketing company for the aviation industry. However, we found the industry was not ready for that. We had to adapt. Now, much of the work that we do is still in print. We still do printed newsletters, postcards and ads. We do a lot of printed material. In fact, we work with professional printers much more than I ever anticipated to meet the needs of our customers.

CEOFCO: *What is next for ABCI? What might be different a year from now?*

Ms. Williams: We are focusing less on the individual services that we offer and more on the overall value for each client. Our membership program and the private Facebook group, connections between members; that is going to be our emphasis in 2016, to explore where that can take us. We've added several features to our Master Class to help people network – more interactive live webinars, podcasts, our book club, "test flights" or reviews of material that we do in the Facebook group, and member highlights where we interview our members so that they can learn about one another and make great referrals.

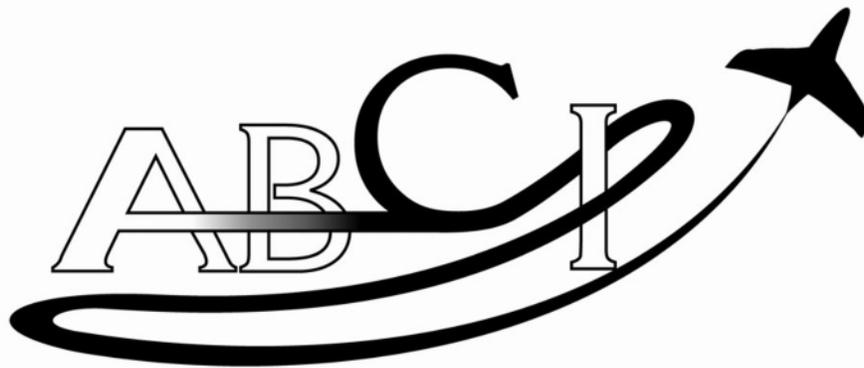
Of course, we will still provide all of the marketing services that we have in the past. In many cases we are finding that people get as much or more value from the memberships as they do from the marketing services.

CEOFCO: *A potential new direction?*

Ms. Williams: Yes. The connections, interactions and joint ventures; they are getting a lot of value from networking, and that was unexpected.

CEOFCO: *Why is ABCI noteworthy?*

Ms. Williams: We are following a trend that I have seen in other industries as far as providing more value than just a simple transaction. All business is personal. Providing that personal connection and making those connections between people, is where a break with the traditional transactional business model is going to be evolving. You can offer much more value because of your connections than you can because of the service you offer when you put those things together.



**For more information visit:
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