

Social Marketing Software for Advocates



Michael Barnett - CEO

About InGo LLC

The only social marketing software of its kind, InGo empowers Advocates to create communities through use of their social networks.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: Mr. Barnett, what is the concept behind InGo?

Mr. Barnett: InGo empowers event attendees to be Advocates who create larger, more social, more valuable events; decreasing the cost of customer acquisition for organizers in the \$500B+, 2B attendee event industry by 87%.

CEOCFO: How will you go about it?

Mr. Barnett: As an event attendee, you are going to get all these emails as part of your normal event registration experience. We enhance that entire process with social plug-ins. You will see a leader board and emails announcing the most effective Advocates, and then you are going to be encouraged to become an Advocate as well. You are going to see which of your friends have become Advocates, and you are going to be able to go on the website and see all the profiles of all the people who are going. During registration, you will have the option of accelerating your registration experience by choosing Facebook, LinkedIn or another social network. At the end of registration, we are going to have used some complex algorithms about who you are close with and who within your network is relevant to the. Generally speaking, you are going to want to invite these suggested contacts because it will be exciting for you to see those friends at the event. The wonderful thing about the entire marketing process is that it is self-incentivizing. You invite certain people because you want to see them. They will want to open the invitation and accept it because it is coming from one of their trusted friends or colleagues.

CEOCFO: Has a similar concept been tried previously?

Mr. Barnett: I think the closest thing to InGo within the event space would be something like Presdo Match, which was created by the former founder of LinkedIn. They focus on some social elements for events such as scheduling and some word of mouth invitations, but they do not really focus on growing, socializing and creating Advocates the way InGo does. Outside of events, there are other advocate marketing companies like Influitive, Branderati and Crowd Twist. Those companies utilize advocate marketing as well, but the incentives are not as well aligned because inviting somebody to try out BMW, for example, does not naturally make BMW more exciting and better, whereas inviting your friends and colleagues to go to an event makes the event itself more exciting and a better experience for you.

CEOCFO: What were some of the challenges in putting together the plan and the technology?

Mr. Barnett: The biggest challenge is often third party integration working with registration companies. There are so many of them and they are so diverse that coming to understand and work with all of them has definitely been a challenge and an opportunity. We have learned a lot in the process. The other challenge would be getting to know all of the players in the event space. The event space is so large, and there are so many different events and kinds of events. That has been a challenge as well.

CEO CFO: *Given that there are so many events and types of events, how will you decide whom to target with your plan?*

Mr. Barnett: We have been very successful with the largest event companies. We now do business with Reed, UBM, Emerald, Hanley Wood, and that list continues to grow. i2i just came on board, and one of the big French companies is about to join as a partner. Those have been really great partners because they teach you a lot about the industry and they have very rich experience in it. We have really enjoyed working with the large enterprise clients, and now we are starting to go downstream toward the smaller event companies as well.

CEO CFO: *What has changed in your concept or execution as it has been available? What do you do know now that you did not think of in the beginning?*

Mr. Barnett: We are realizing that we can provide many of our services very quickly because we do not actually have to integrate into the registration process. There is incredible opportunity to go live on an event the same day, whereas it used to take us a month or two. That opportunity has been fantastic for our clients because we can start growing their events as little as three weeks out, whereas it used to take us a month and a half. The ability to act quickly and be available quickly is important because many of our clients come to us at the last minute when they need sudden growth and they need to grow their event by three to six percent in three weeks. Finding solutions for that and being able to provide that has been really exciting for everybody.

“InGo empowers event attendees to be Advocates who create larger, more social, more valuable events.” - Michael Barnett

CEO CFO: *Walk us through a typical engagement. What are the steps you take when you are working for someone and they ask for help?*

Mr. Barnett: The first step is to get all their past attendees, exhibitors, and their entire crowd, and send them an email saying if you want to become a VIP for the event, here is your opportunity. Come in, invite your friends and colleagues. They come in and they start building this base momentum for the event. We populate what we call “Who’s In”, which is the widget you can install anywhere that shows everyone who is going, they start sending out these personal invites and they start posting to their wall. You will get thousands of personal invites and hundreds of thousands of impressions just by sending out these emails. If there’s enough time before the event, we integrate into registration. We have some really great registration partners like Experient, ITN, N200, and we are announcing more all the time. We can go live very quickly with our premier registration partners, which is wonderful. We also give organizers access to highly detailed reports so they can see who invited whom and what time, when and why they are coming. They can see their event growing right before their eyes and which of their advocates that growth can be attributed to. It is two things: turning attendees into advocates and then getting those advocates to be active. Step one is emails to pass attendees and potential attendees to get them to advocate, and the next step is to build us a registration so that you are getting people to advocate as a registrant.

CEO CFO: *What is your revenue model?*

Mr. Barnett: We use a couple models. One is revenue per attendee, and many of our clients like that because it takes away the risk that we grow their event by a ton and then they are on the hook for a lot of money that they did not budget for. Many conferences where they are making money off each incremental attendee, like paying performance because they are just going to pay us \$50 to \$100 per additional attendee.

CEO CFO: *Are you funded for the next steps you would like to take? What is the plan going forward?*

Mr. Barnett: We are well funded for current operations, but we are going to close a Series A at the end of October to expand into more events and more channel partners.

CEO CFO: *You mentioned a company in France. Do you see international as a big growth area for you? With international companies that are sponsoring events, does it pretty much run the same as US events?*

Mr. Barnett: Most of our clients are international and they do events all over the world. I would say half of our events have been outside the US if not the majority.



CEOCFO: *How do people running events find out about you, or is it strictly outreach from your end at this point?*

Mr. Barnett: We have been covered in several event publications, and we end up at a bunch of the industry events meeting people there. Some of our favorite registration companies continue to bring us more clients who need their events to grow, and then everybody wins; the registration company has more registrants, the attendees have more friends and colleagues at the event, and the organizer is thrilled because their event is bigger.

CEOCFO: *Why do you think this concept has not been tried before?*

Mr. Barnett: It is challenging to pick and know who you would want to invite to come and who would respond. The other challenge is that a registration company providing the service does not make a ton of sense.

The two big kinds of tech companies are registration and mobile app in the event space, and the other one is well-positioned to offer the service.

CEOCFO: *Put it all together for our readers. Why pay attention to InGo? What sets the company apart?*

Mr. Barnett: We are growing at a massive rate. In the last year, InGo has captured more of the world's biggest event companies than anyone else, and we are going to continue growing because we can decrease the cost of customer acquisition for our clients by over 80 percent. In a few years, we will have many of the registration companies as channel partners, and we will be in a great position to have a large piece of the event industry as our clients.

BIO: Michael Barnett is the Founder and CEO InGo which harnesses the power of social media to empower attendees to grow events, proving a 10-20x return on investment and 5-10% attendance growth. Prior to starting InGo Michael spoke around the world about using social media to start and develop grass roots organizations and often captured hundreds of supporters in a single day. Before, being a speaker and consultant on organization development for non-profits, Michael studied at Virginia Tech with a brief break to intern in British Parliament for Nigel Waterson, the Member of Parliament from Eastbourne. While a student at Virginia Tech, Michael held various leadership roles including class treasurer, and graduated in 2006 with a bachelors in Political Science and Philosophy.



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