

BACKGROUND

A major focus of Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s administration has been on the economic development of New York City. An integral part of this effort, which includes providing businesses with programs and services to support their growth, is under the purview of New York City’s Department of Small Business Services (NYC Dept. of SBS).

Within the NYC Department of SBS, a special division, known as NYC Business Solutions was formed to provide programs that support the growth of employers across all of New York City’s five boroughs. NYC Business Solutions provides special training grants which employers use to train and advance their workforce. NYC Business Solutions also creates customized recruiting programs for companies. The agency believes that the best way to place more New York City residents into jobs is to establish a clear understanding of the job functions and skill sets required by employers with large scale hiring needs.

These programs have been very successful and have contributed significantly to New York City’s economic growth. NYC Business Solutions has supported over 45 companies hire over 1700 employees and has disbursed over \$2.3 M in grant money that has supported the career advancement and wage increase of over 1477 employees. Time Warner Cable, JP Morgan Chase, Net-a-Porter, and Macy’s are among the many clients NYC Business Solutions has served.

Like all successful government organizations, NYC Business Solutions consistently evaluates how it can provide a better service to clients. Recently, the organization initiated efforts to attract a greater number of large employers, improve its client relationships and identify methods to encourage employers to use its grants towards innovative training programs. Cristina Shapiro, an Assistant Commissioner within NYC SBS recognized that “We (NYC Business Solutions) needed to determine if our service offering was well matched to our clients’ business needs and we needed to identify ways to elicit better on-going feedback from our clients.”

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*Ms. Shapiro, Assistant Commissioner,
NYC Dept. of SBS*

To support these efforts, NYC Business Solutions submitted a request for proposal (RFP) for research and consulting services. The core focus of the RFP consisted of conducting focus groups with existing and prospective customers. The data from the focus groups would be used to determine how NYC Business solu-

Client:

The New York City Department of Small Business Services

Products/Services:

Hiring & Training Services for NYC employers

Challenge:

Need to improve customer experience by gathering customer feedback and incorporating it into service development

Maia’s Methodology:

Intensive customer analysis–
“One-on-One” customer interviews and Focus Groups

Results:

- Developed targeted messaging strategy
- Increased ROI on marketing efforts
- Improved services through better customer interaction

tions could improve its marketing efforts, service delivery and overall client satisfaction.

APPROACH

With its experience in focus group research, Maia Strategy Group believed that this research methodology would be useful to support NYC Business Solutions, but did not think it could be relied upon as the only source of data. Focus groups, while extremely valuable in providing deep and thoughtful insight from participants, also have constraints. The cost of administering a focus group limited the number of focus groups that NYC Business Solutions could conduct. As a result, there would be an inadequate amount of data that would be available for analysis. To address the potential lack of data, Maia decided to deviate from the exact requirements of the RFP and proposed a more robust and customized approach. Our unique approach differentiated Maia’s capabilities and was a major factor in winning the bid for this engagement. “Maia did research on our services and delivered a thoughtful proposal to maximize the effectiveness of our investment. They allocated time to learn about our services from internal staff and client one-on-one interviews to prepare a targeted interview guide for the focus groups” says Ms. Shapiro.

Maia initiated the engagement with extensive interviews with the senior management of NYC Business Solutions. This “internal perspective” was critical to ensuring Maia understood the organization’s objectives, how it delivered its services, and the challenges it faced. Maia also conducted ten one-on-one interviews with NYC

Business Solutions’ current and prospective clients. Since each interview lasted 30-45 minutes, these interviews significantly expanded upon the data gathered from the focus groups. Given the limited number focus groups being conducted, it was valuable for Maia to leverage the one-on-one client interviews to determine the most important topics to cover during the focus groups. Ultimately, this upfront research ensured NYC Business Solutions’ budget was utilized most effectively.

After each major milestone of the engagement – internal interviews, one-on-one interviews, and focus groups – Maia updated NYC Business Solutions with its results. This permitted



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NYC Business Solutions to continuously provide Maia with feedback. “Maia scheduled content and process ‘check-ins,’” says Ms. Shapiro. “These regular updates elicited feedback

from us at key crossroads during the engagement, while driving the project forward.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

Maia's research concluded that clients were interested in receiving a consistent volume of quality candidates. Clients valued this consistency, often times, more than quantity. NYC Business Solutions' clients found that they often go through the process of hiring candidates, which is a major administrative and resource commitment, only to have those new-hires leave the company within several months. Clients wanted quality not quantity. Their success was largely driven by a consistent flow of quality candidates that would improve employee retention. Ms. Shapiro cites, *"Maia got clear feedback on our clients' critical business needs and attributes they wanted from HR service providers,*

such as consistent volumes of candidates and the importance of improving retention."

Maia's recommendations included several marketing strategies and tactics to help NYC Business Solutions attract customers. Maia developed a value proposition which clearly differentiates NYC Business Solutions' services versus other recruiting agencies. From its research, Maia determined the types of promotions that resonate best with NYC Business Solutions' clients and recommended new marketing channels that most effectively reach NYC Business Solutions' target audience. Maia determined NYC Business Solutions should not use direct mail campaigns to promote their ser-

vices to human resource (HR) executives responsible for hiring and training employees. According to the focus groups, most of this promotional material goes unnoticed. Instead, this audience responds more effectively to service providers that introduce themselves and give speeches at HR conferences, clubs and associations.

From an operational perspective, Maia guided NYC Business Solutions with new tactics to improve its service delivery and ensure greater customer satisfaction. Maia also determined how NYC Business Solutions can improve its efforts to obtain critical customer feedback necessary to continuously improve its services.

RESULTS

In response to clients' requirement for consistent job candidate referrals, NYC Business Solutions began to focus more on measuring and tracking the consistency of the referral volumes it provides clients.

Maia also steered NYC Business Solutions marketing resources and efforts towards the right channels and supported the organization with developing marketing materials that would resonate best with HR professionals. Ms. Shapiro says, *"I think with a better understanding on how we can reach our target audience, our marketing efforts will be much more productive."*

Ms. Shapiro is confident that NYC Business Solutions' clients will be pleased with the new way the organization is working with them. Ms. Shapiro says, *"We now align our clients' expectations with their needs for consistency and we realized having quick and regular touch points with them is the best way to determine if we are doing a good job. Our clients will be enthusiastic about our new approach."*

ABOUT MAIA STRATEGY GROUP

Maia Strategy Group is a boutique strategy consultancy that specializes in conducting customized market research and analysis to support organizations with their mission-critical decisions. Maia supports clients by filling in their gaps of knowledge through its study of critical external market environment – competitors, customers, partners and suppliers.

Maia Strategy Group is located in New York City's Financial District and works with a select group of clients, including Fortune 500 organizations and Government agencies.