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T.C. Coleman of Upward Action

Helping businesses
say who they are—
one story at a time





Upward Action

By Scott Krady, Photos by Dan Epstein

Helping businesses say who they are—one story at a time

Working with small businesses had always fascinated T.C. Coleman. As an attorney at Fried Frank in Washington, DC, and later at a government agency, she worked closely with not-for-profits, helping them build sustainable businesses and client bases.

Then in 2007, Coleman's pro bono legal work became a business of her own, and Upward Action launched as a side venture, focusing on brand development and interactive marketing for businesses. Two years later, Upward Action became her full-time job—and passion.

With offices in Deerfield, NJ, and New York City, Upward Action operates virtually, employing a team of assistants and consultants nationwide. Its customers range from NASA to the New Jersey Association of Women Business Owners, and include a host of small- to mid-size businesses such as law firms, professional services, retail, health care, engineering, and accounting firms.

Although the company performs many services for its clients, at its core, Upward Action is about helping companies realize their true value, Coleman says. "We build magnetic' brands," she says. "Ones that connect to the heart and soul of their clients."

Today, brands are about intangible benefits, she says, and companies that work with Upward Action can learn how to build trust and loyalty by improving the ways in which customers think about them.

To do so, Upward Action employs a range of services, with the bulk of them composed of training workshops focused on brand development. Upward Action conducts on-site and virtual training sessions designed to help a business tell its story and develop a message through different marketing platforms.

"There's nothing better than working with a client and having them understand the value they provide to their

customers," Coleman says. "An estate lawyer often doesn't realize the peace of mind he provides to his clients by improving relations between family members in difficult time. They have a calming effect that goes beyond simply selling services."

In addition to one-on-one coaching, Upward Action provides strategic planning around their brands. This often involves a company's position relative to the competition, and is designed to help companies leverage content to communicate the key aspects of the brand.

Telling a Company's "Story"

Upward Action will take a company's existing content and help leverage it to tell a company's story in a powerful way that connects with clients. It can also be used to build a strong online presence using video, text and imagery. Coleman handles most of the strategic planning, individual coaching and workshops, but Upward Action also has branding and marketing experts in specific areas. Collectively they implement marketing programs in the New Jersey region and the tri-state area.

"Our focus is on helping our clients establish themselves as the only brand," Coleman says. "We want them to be leaders in their industry from both a business and thought leadership perspective."

On the social media front, Upward Action builds Facebook communities for businesses, such as physicians or attorneys, and can even do so based on a particular practice area. Recently, it launched a LinkedIn group for a client. But it does more, including developing social media policies. "Companies today need rules and procedures regarding the use of social media—especially as it relates to company information and employees," Coleman notes. Her legal background is a strong asset in this role, helping companies manage the increasingly important and complex role of social media.

Yet, it isn't only about Facebook updates and "Tweeting," Coleman says. "Social media is just one way that tells a story of brand," she says. "Our approach is on integration—

understanding a brand's core messaging and making online and face-to-face connections with customers."

Coleman believes companies increase business by influencing customers. "They need to be able to attract, engage, and influence their target markets," she says. And one way to do that is through leadership. To that end, Upward Action ghostwrites articles, white papers, and blog posts for many of its customers.

Rooted in Community Groups

Coleman began working with small businesses while a student at Columbia University Law School. In her third year, she began working with non-profit clinics and community groups, helping organizations shape their vision.

After graduation, she joined the prestigious law firm of Fried Frank, worked as a private equity lawyer, and later spent three years as a financial regulator. A job as an in-house counsel for a luxury brand brought her to New Jersey, where she worked closely with marketing and advertising, inspiring her to work with small businesses.

Conveying the Intangibles

Coleman says that products and services have both a tangible and intangible effect on customers. "Take a retailer, for example," she says. "There's nothing more exciting than having a store owner who can convey the idea that he is selling a garment that gives a customer a sense of confidence when they wear it."

"We teach retailers that they can help their customers improve self-esteem, which is often something they haven't thought about."

Recently, Upward Action helped a client whose multiple services had created a perception problem in customers. Upward Action helped the company weave together its services, building a cohesive message and a value that could be communicated to its customers.

While Upward Action has always provided

virtual training for businesses, it is now launching programs such as social and Internet marketing, aimed at helping companies leverage the Web to expand their brands.

And, while social marketing is all the buzz, Coleman says it means little unless companies can track their success. "At the end of the day it's about measuring results," she says. "If you can't measure it with a specific business objective, it's not worth it."

Upward Action is hoping to change that by shifting the emphasis toward integrated brands. Led by Coleman, the company is helping small businesses and executives tell their customers who they are, one story at a time.



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