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Beyond Word Of Mouth: Telling The Story Of Bay Alarm's Success



Bay Alarm Company, the nation's largest family owned-and-operated security and fire systems company, knows word-of-mouth is the best form of advertising. Since it was founded in 1946, the stories of satisfied customers have helped ensure the company's success. And this couldn't be truer today.

In 1992, Bay Alarm approached J. Stokes & Associates for help in differentiating itself in an increasingly competitive industry.

This posed a different type of challenge for J. Stokes & Associates, a marketing agency with a proven track record of helping businesses thrive. Here was a third-generation, family-run company — already a leader in its industry — looking to communicate its unique advantage and grow its customer base.

“Bay Alarm was a fractured organization, at least by advertising standards,” said Eric Taylor, the company's vice president of sales and marketing. “We had three different ad campaigns running, three logos and about 25 different messages. We looked like 15 different companies. And we were spending a lot of money unnecessarily.”

The J. Stokes team focused on the innovative use of customer testimonials to help Bay Alarm increase market share throughout the Bay Area and up and down the Central Valley. The campaign began with an emphasis in Northern California and has recently expanded throughout the entire state.

J. Stokes recommended producing 60-second radio spots that allowed real customers to tell their stories, and in doing so, to tell the true story of Bay Alarm. After placing the spots on one Bay Area station, the company saw its leads grow and increased their marketing budget to allow for expansion into additional markets.

“Once they saw the proof, they were more willing to invest in radio,” said agency president Jim Stokes. “These testimonial ads were a natural extension of the word-of-mouth marketing that sits at the core of this company. The feel of the campaign is akin to hearing about the company from a friend, but on a much larger scale.”

The momentum created by the radio spots eventually spilled over into a new outdoor campaign that helped to further unify the brand and message for the company. The highway billboards and Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) signage

Bay Alarm Company

SpeedDee Oil Change & Tune-Up
Subway

introduced a unique look for Bay Alarm: a dark red background with a red halo and the provocative “What have you got to lose?” tagline. Clever headlines, such as “Headed to work? So are the burglars.” continue to grab the attention of commuters each day.

A print ad from the recent campaign asks how “good” Bay Alarm is at security. The answer? “Let’s just say that in 57 years, we’ve never been robbed.”

According to the company, this campaign has significantly helped to increase leads and has positively impacted company sales. **“After the first year, our leads increased into the double-digits. In the second year they were up another 10-12 percent,” said Bay Alarm’s Taylor. And the icing on the cake? “Our budget never increased – only our strategy changed.”**

In the time it has been working with J. Stokes, Bay Alarm has expanded from five markets to 12 and has grown from a staff of 250 to 600.

“Growth is fantastic, but it also presents huge marketing challenges,” said Taylor. “Jim and his team have met those challenges every step of the way.

They give straight answers to straight questions – which is refreshing in a business that’s not always that way.

They fit our culture and get the job done.”

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