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Marketing automation app generating revenues in Cedar Rapids

BY SARAH ZOOK ASSOCIATE EDITOR

The Cedar Rapids (Iowa) Gazette went live in October with Buzz 360's marketing automation software to power its annual bridal show, Iowa Bridal Planner.

"It's a slick deal. I really like it," Chris Edwards, vice president of sales and customer care for Source Media Group — parent company of the Gazette, told *News & Tech*. "The thing that appealed to me most was the fact that they recognize that everything about software done by smart people is over-engineered. People don't use 60 percent of what is available."

The platform allows publishers to create a database surrounding a community or a topic — such as weddings in the case of the Gazette. Buzz 360 touts its software as a way for businesses to use technology to get as much done as possible.

"If you scale that back and give them a few rudimentary tools to use, they will use them," he explained.

Fusion Farm — a group within Source Media — was set up to work with small start-ups and entrepreneurs in order to create new ways to approach media and journalism within the Cedar Rapids community. To that end, Iowa Bridal Planner was started as a new revenue stream for the Gazette.

"Journalism needs to be more inclusive," Edwards said. "We need to ask ourselves, what are we doing? Who do we want to be? How do we want to be a part of this community and how are we going to pay for that?"

Edwards said when he discovered Buzz 360, he felt the company's software was a good fit.

"I liked what they were doing for small business as a tool for them to interact with clients one on one," he said. "Like social networking."

Since events was one of the revenue streams Fusion Farm had been looking at and the wedding expo has been tried and true, Iowa Bridal Planner seemed like a logical place to implement Buzz 360.

"We're filling every category well in advance," Edwards said.

The expo attracts thousands of visitors every year and the vendors love it. Buzz 360 offers them a site that stays active all year so successful revenue generation from the venture doesn't rely solely on the printed newspaper.

"(Being able to) post catalogs of pictures is a great add-on feature," Edwards said. "(And) there isn't a lot of labor outside of selling it."

The software and creators were flexible enough for the Gazette to get exactly what it wanted, he said. "They overhauled their technology to fit what we were doing."

So far, selling space within the feature has been fairly easy. All of last year's participating vendors were preloaded into a database for the Gazette so all the vendor had to do was claim their account.

"It is a good solid value add to our clients," Edwards said.

While the technology won't replace classified losses, according to Edwards, paired with other digital services, it does create a solid revenue stream.

Digitally speaking, facilitating transactions between businesses and clients can be a significant revenue source for publishers.

"If we can get a cut of that, so much the better," he said.

Buzz 360 touts its marketing automation software's ability to create non-advertisement and non-news revenue, and will continue to

Photo: Buzz 360



actively court publishers following its successful partnership with the Gazette, according to creator Klaus Schneegans.

Veteran software engineers Schneegans and his wife, Lisa, created the company. While they were trying to remodel their kitchen. It occurred to them that the contractors in their area didn't want to spend time marketing and figuring out social media and they could benefit from software that would do that for them.

Buzz 360 provides vendors with a directory page, he explained. Vendors can upload photos

Buzz 360 continued on page 2

Buzz 360 from page 1

and information about services as well as contact information. In the background, the vendor can opt to have emails sent to clients requesting online reviews. They can post updates directly to Facebook and stay in touch with past clients. The platform features built-in templates for customer letters and other tools.

“They don’t have to create a list or write it,” Schneegans explained. “There are a limited amount of choices but a lot of people would rather not make the choice.”

The main Buzz 360 site also automatically adjusts based on the mobile device used for access in a bid to streamline the experience for users no matter how they connect.

“The biggest strengths are invisible to the user, they just happen,” Schneegans said.

The software can be whitelabeled allowing publishers to sell it on a monthly or annual subscription basis to customers. ▲

Photo: Gazette/Source Media

