

Organizational Planning Enables South Central To Add Services, Manage Change with Fewer Hiccups

The Challenge

Like so many other talented business leaders, South Central Radio Group President Craig Jacobus could see opportunity in the digital revolution. As it became clear that his radio advertising customers needed digital marketing expertise, he was poised to hire the talent so South Central could offer it.

The question he pondered was *how* to offer it. Should this be a separate business unit? Or should it be incorporated into South Central's existing business structure? What would it look like? How would they get there?

His ultimate solution: a three-day strategic and organizational planning session with facilitator Todd Gross, of ADVISA. "We came out with a road map, a step-by-step plan. We were able to develop our goals in the right order," Jacobus said.

In the year since that time, the company has changed its name from South Central Radio Group to South Central Media. They now offer website development, search marketing and permission-based e-mail marketing along with radio advertising. Their account executives can now walk into a client meeting, fully assess their needs, and provide solutions -- be they radio solutions, website solutions, or search solutions.

And the new company is on track to contribute to profits by the second half of 2010.

"I believe we got it right the first time around. Organizational planning saves you a lot of hours and anguish. Without it, we would have had to re-do a lot of things," Jacobus said.

The Process

The planning session consisted of a large group of executives and managers -- stakeholders representing 13 radio stations in three markets -- led by Gross. "It was engaging and participative, but at the same time, it was like herding cats," Jacobus said.

"You've got disparate views and disparate needs," he said. "Anytime you are going through a process where people's turf, their future, and their responsibilities are in flux -- and everyone has their own opinion about how it should look and will look -- it is necessary to go through a frank dialog."

But by the end of three days, Gross was able to encapsulate these disparate views and shape a strategy. "He did a wonderful job of distilling it all," Jacobus said.

Gross was a key component of the success of the session because of his outsider status and business expertise, Jacobus said. "Without an outside facilitator, you really can't get a consensus," he said. "Everyone else is invested in the company. The outside perspective allowed Gross to say things that no one else could."

"When I say things, the others will nod their heads and go along with it because I'm head of the company," Jacobus said. "When Todd says things, they will challenge him instead."

In addition, Gross's business and people expertise permits him to compare South Central's business structure and talent management to "best practices" across many industries. Gross has been a management

consultant with ADVISA since 1999. Prior to that, he was Chairman of the Board, President and CEO of a financial institution in southern Indiana, and was involved in several entrepreneurial businesses. At ADVISA, Gross provides clients with unique assessment tools, training programs and consulting that allow them to maximize their productivity and profitability.

“Getting that many people to arrive at a place that everyone could agree upon -- that would have been impossible without the point of view that he brought and the talent that he brought,” Jacobus said

The Results

Everyone who participated agreed the planning session was worthwhile, Jacobus said. Their opinions got heard, they were part of crafting the strategy, and they had a voice in where the company ended up. “This was not a top-down cram-down,” he said.

A year later, Gross led another organizational planning meeting with Jacobus and a smaller group of executive managers to create a plan for the *next* 12 months.

“The first plan got us to start-up, launch and integration,” Jacobus said. “We re-named the company as part of this. Now that we are up and operating, what are the operating issues and what do we need to do to make this flourish? These questions were addressed in a 2-day planning session.”

This time, they walked away with tasks lists and timelines more extensive than the first that address ongoing challenges in operations, marketing, and delivery.

“The first time around, it was finding space, getting furniture, and everything you need to build the house,” Jacobus said. “Now it is decorating and living in it.”