

Nick Vehr: Making relationships count

1:12 AM, Jan. 15, 2011



Nick Vehr at his public relations firm, 700 Walnut St , which he started at his Westwood home five years ago and has grown to 15 employees despite the recession. / The Enquirer/Amie Dworecki

Lisa Bernard-Kuhn
lbernard@enquirer.com

DOWNTOWN - It's still settling in for Nick Vehr.

Since setting out on his own in 2007 - working from a corner table in a bedroom of his family's Westwood home - Vehr Communications has grown to a 15-employee agency with an expanding client base that includes Cincinnati's leading non-profits, trade groups and corporate giants.

Three months ago the firm moved into 6,000 square feet of newly renovated office space downtown at 700 Walnut St.

A former Cincinnati City Councilman, Chamber of Commerce executive and Convention & Visitors Bureau board chairman - Vehr, 51, says his firm has found success by helping clients strategically manage their reputations, relationships and results.

"It all comes down to the reputation of an organization, which is really driven by how they manage their relationships," Vehr says. "When they do that well, it directly drives results."

Key to Vehr Communications' growth has been the firm's ability to work closely with clients to help direct all facets of their communication needs with the focus of creating value.

"For some clients the goal might be to sell more stuff. For others it might be to raise awareness about an issue. We come in as strategic communicators," he said. "If someone calls us and asks us to just write a press release, we typically refer them elsewhere. We do so much more than that. For us to bring value, we have to be fully engaged at a very strategic level."

Among his top clients is Formica Corp., the Evendale-based manufacturer of decorative countertop surfaces.

The company tapped Vehr Communications to help craft strategies for the firm's internal and external communications efforts including national media exposure, Formica's online and social media efforts and even the firm's employee newsletters.

"We frankly have very few vendors, and we like it that way," says Bill Roush, director of communications and marketing at Formica. "We view our vendors as members of our team, so we're always discussing our strategy and they know very intimate details of our company."

Recent examples of the pay-off of Vehr's work, Roush says, is a photo spread in a recent issue of This Old House magazine. Formica.com also was named by Google Insights as one of the top 10 web sites for searches in the home and garden category.

"Nick is a very savvy businessman, and he's done a pretty impressive job for us," Roush says.

Vehr, of course, also has looked to his own relationships in Cincinnati to drum up new opportunities.

Among his clients are the Port of Greater Cincinnati Development Authority and Cincinnati's Convention & Visitors Bureau - both groups in which Vehr has previously served in leadership roles.

For the upcoming World Choir Games in 2012 - an event that's expected to make a more than \$70 million economic impact on Cincinnati - Vehr has been tapped to serve as managing director of Cincinnati's organizing committee. It's the kind of event that Vehr's been championing to bring to Cincinnati, since heading up a lost effort to bring the 2012 Summer Olympics here.

So far, the role has been primarily volunteer for Vehr, but the position has put his firm in line to be among the primary vendors that will help plan and run the show.

"With his wide variety of experiences as a community leader and work in economic development, he was the perfect guy for this position," says Dan Lincoln, president and CEO of the Convention & Visitors Bureau. "This is a monster-size event that's going to bring thousands of people to Cincinnati, and ultimately all the details will filter up to Nick and Vehr Communications in terms of operations and logistics."

Vehr says the firm's success going forward will be the result of the work and talent of the growing team he's assembling. Already he's looking to hire at least two more public relations professionals to add to his squad.

"There really is some awesome talent here," he said. "I realize I'll still be a part of the brand here, but as we grow, it's my goal to become less and less a part of the reason we get hired as a company."

Getting this far hasn't been easy for Vehr, who says he previously set out to pursue ownership roles in firms in the past that didn't work out.

"Failure was not an option for me," he says. "This is the 401(k) plan for my family. This is our retirement. Everything. It hasn't stopped being scary yet, but if we were able to experience this kind of growth during the economic cycle we've just seen, I can't wait to see what 2011 and 2012 are going to bring."

Source: Cincinnati.com

<http://news.cincinnati.com/article/20110115/BIZ01/101150324/1055/NEWS/Nick-Vehr-Making-relationships-count>