

Springboard's Vogel propels comms efforts for disabled Americans

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Nadine Vogel's career has evolved around her passion for and absolute commitment to helping companies reach the disabled community. She has firsthand experience, as both of her daughters have disabilities. She has also founded a number of successful ventures, including a nonprofit, a division of MetLife, and Springboard Consulting, a firm that specializes in reaching the disabled market.

In 2007, she conceived and organized the Annual Disability Matters Awards and Conference to recognize and connect companies doing outstanding work in the category. Cisco Systems, The Hartford Insurance Company, and Novartis were among the eight companies honored this year at the April 16 conference in New York City.

“Three years ago, I realized companies... were starting to... do great work for this segment, but no one knew about it,” Vogel says. “Many were shocked that other companies were also doing it. They asked if I could put them in touch. Acknowledgment and sharing of best practices [was needed].”

Vogel explains that understanding the value of marketing to the disabled community is particularly important in the current economic climate.

“Many companies [are uncertain about] segment marketing in this economy,” she notes. “The disabled market is now the largest minority market in the world. The US population has surpassed the Hispanic population by 5%. It's a market with money. And it's one of the most loyal populations because, historically, we've ignored them. If companies show they care and understand their needs, they've got them and everyone they know for life.”

Peppercom managing partner Steve Cody is a member of the Springboard Dream Team, an advisory board that provides guidance and direction in furthering Springboard's

mission. Cody describes Vogel as a bright, unforgettable person who has “an impact wherever she goes.” He says she has “magic in a bottle” in terms of her personality, her experience with and knowledge of the disabled market, and her timing – as President Obama’s administration is much more supportive of funding disability programs.

“She has a very compelling business argument,” explains Cody, adding that Peppercom and Springboard have jointly pitched existing and new client business. “Even if you’re AIG -- I don’t care what kind of shape you’re in right now – it’s good corporate citizenship and good marketing.”

Springboard helps clients with everything from ideation and development, to execution and promotion, to tracking and measurement for both internal and external programs. Vogel helped auditing and accounting firm KPMG increase employee engagement in a disability affinity network from 45 to over 450 in just nine months.

“Nadine is incredibly knowledgeable and provided us great insight and ideas for growing our disabilities network,” says Barbara Wankoff, national director of workplace solutions at KPMG, which has over 21,000 US partners and employees.

Wankoff and Vogel spoke together about KPMG’s program and best practices in March at the Conference Board’s Work Life Conference in New Orleans. They’ll speak together at two more conferences this year.

Prior to founding Springboard, Vogel spent nearly two decades at MetLife. As assistant VP of marketing, she wrote a business plan in 1997 to create a dedicated division to serve the disabled community. The following year, MetDESK, MetLife’s division of estate planning for special kids, launched with Vogel at the helm. In 2000, it expanded to market the service through existing corporate customers as a benefit for their employees.

“It became one of the most successful areas of the company and the first of its kind in the financial services industry,” Vogel says.

In 1993, Vogel founded the nonprofit SNAP (Special Needs Advocate for Parents), which merged with United Cerebral Palsy in July 2008. Her experience with SNAP informed the MetLife program. While at MetLife, companies in many different industries began to ask Vogel to help them build programs like MetDESK.

Though it was a tough decision to leave MetLife, Vogel founded Springboard in 2006 because she felt she couldn't pass on opportunities to help so many more companies reach the disabled community.

"Each thing has been a 'springboard' to the next," she says.

Later this year, Vogel will speak at global business conferences in London and Paris. She's also written a book called "Dive In," which is about how businesses can generate profit and productivity by reaching the disabled market. It is expected to be out in time for National Disability Month in October.

"Everything I do... either currently benefits or will benefit my children and others like them," Vogel explains. "I'm like a kid in a candy shop. It's not brain surgery, certainly, but it's really important. Now, Obama has made disability part of his core agenda. It's not going away. It's getting bigger."