

Liberty Tax Service: Tracking the ROI of our PR activity



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- Martha O’Gorman, Chief Marketing Officer, Liberty Tax Service



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Liberty Tax Service is a branded tax preparation business with a franchise network of more than 3500 offices across the USA and Canada. Founded just twelve years ago, the company is now a market leader – thanks, in part, to an innovative marketing mix that emphasizes PR, guerilla marketing and social media.

Chief Marketing Officer Martha O’Gorman joined Liberty Tax Service in 1996, after working with founder John Hewitt at his previous company Jackson Hewitt. She oversees a communications team of 21 members, several of whom use Vocus PR Software on a daily basis.

The Challenge:

Before becoming a client of Vocus, the Liberty Tax PR team was suffering a frustration common to many PR professions: the difficulty of calculating the return the company was getting on its PR efforts.

“You can spend a lot of time, manpower and money on PR efforts,” says CMO Martha O’Gorman. “You develop press kits, you get good photography and you draft releases. You can do all the stuff that goes into a great PR plan, but unless you get a good hit – on the Today Show, say – can you really tell what you’re getting back?”

“When I put together my marketing strategy for franchise development – for attracting new franchisees – the PR side of it was just as important as the paid advertising side. In fact, in terms of our entire strategy, PR is as important to me as any paid advertising that we do – so we were very interested in getting a handle on what we get from it in terms of ROI.”

The Solution:

Liberty Tax Service became a Vocus customer and is now one of Vocus’ most involved and in-depth users.

A day’s Vocus activity at Liberty Tax Service starts with extensive news monitoring. The company scores hundreds of thousands of media hits a year, thanks to activities including Liberty’s annual “Up All Night” Slumber Party™, where staff work around the clock in the final days before tax deadline, as well as to their widely-recognized Statue of Liberty-costumed street wavers. Once the monitoring reports are generated, the team uses Vocus Analytics to quantify the impact of their coverage.

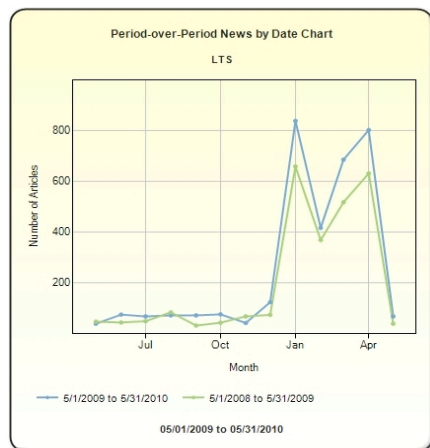


Figure 1: Vocus plots a year’s worth of news coverage for Liberty Tax Service.

This analytics chart shows the team the extent of the spike in their coverage during tax season, when it increases by up to ten times due to seasonal campaigns.

“We need to see the relationship between our media attention and the development of our business,” says Martha. “In tax season, we use Vocus to quantify our results every single day, and we do it once a month during the off-season. We also use the software to see how we’re stacking up against our competitors.”

The team also works extensively with Vocus media lists, maintaining around a number of different lists at all times for different activities ranging from franchise marketing to tax season media campaigns, and they value the ability to add and delete journalists easily to keep each list relevant.

"We have around 50 different media lists at any one time," says Marketing and PR Director Nina Cunningham. "We have several for franchise opportunities. We have several for our franchisees to use, covering different designated marketing areas (DMAs) for different promotions. With our slumber party activity, we might create a different distribution list for each market and send out a targeted press release to each area, featuring different spokespeople, for example. This year, we ranked at #9 in the 'Franchise 500' – Entrepreneur's list of the 500 fastest-growing franchises in the US and Canada – and Vocus has helped us achieve that by letting us streamline the process and manage our strategy better on a local level."

"We're also using PRWeb's online news releases a great deal," says Nina, "which has resulted in our getting picked up by a lot more websites. We're using it to send out news releases and stories addressing people's tax concerns, and we use PRWeb's SEO option on every release we send out. In the last year, it's helped us to do a lot more with keywords and SEO, and in driving people to our website."

"Finally, there's never been a problem or a question that I've had about Vocus that I can't pick up the phone and get solved almost instantly. And I can't say that about a lot of other organizations I work with. If we have a need or a suggestion, Vocus answers it."

The Benefits:

Vocus has delivered the thing we were most interested in," says Martha O'Gorman. It quantifies what all of our activity means in terms of ROI, and shows us that it makes sense for us to invest in the people and resources to beef up our PR activity. Being able to track the impact of our PR is so valuable to us that it pays for the money we spend with Vocus. It shows us what it would cost in media dollars to get the exposure we're getting through PR."

"Then, there's all the other stuff that goes with it. The fact that we can look at what our competitors are doing and how we stack up against them – that's a benefit. We've only been in business 12 years, but we've been able to rival our competitors through unique marketing techniques and PR which - partly thanks to Vocus – we're really good at.

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"With our company being as big as it is, Vocus is a wonderful way to stay on top of our activities," adds Nina Cunningham. "We have over 3500 offices and it helps us keep in touch with each market in a way we never could before. You can access news, you can find a reporter with a fast name search; you can build lists to give to franchisees. We're utilizing it more and more as a team and we're still learning a lot from it."

"We're now looking forward to Vocus' new Social Media offering," says Martha. "In particular, we're looking forward to analyzing the impact our social media strategy is having on the public, and measuring our ROI on the money we're spending in that area. I'm delighted that Vocus is going to be at the forefront of that field as well."