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# Think Big Solutions moves past printing

Commerce City company expands into marketing with new division

Denver Business Journal - by [Jeremy Johnson](#)

For business owner Shawn Allison, his big marketing ideas began with baby steps. Actually, baby lettuce, to be more precise.

“I sold baby lettuce before baby lettuce was cool,” Allison said. “Most people thought it was rabbit food.”

Always ahead of the curve, the agricultural marketing major left the baby-lettuce market behind in 1991, a year after graduating from California Polytechnic State University, and moved to Colorado, where he began working for **IKON Office Solutions** in printing. As Allison saw the print industry transform from physical to digital in the late 1990s, his thoughts went from big to grandiose.

“There was really nobody specializing in digital printing,” Allison said.

So with the help of some silent investors and a few maxed-out credit cards, Allison scraped together \$40,000 in 1998 and leased a 600-square-foot office in Commerce City (where the business is still located). And for more than a decade, a little company called **Think Big Solutions** has supplied its customers with a range of small, and rather humble, print services.

“We have customers that think of us as the ‘banner people,’ or customers that think of us as the place to get their business cards,” said Mark Jones, Think Big’s director of strategies. “While that’s great, and we run those products too, one of our challenges right now is getting people to realize that a small company like ours can bring big benefits to their bottom line.”

That’s why Allison has launched a new division called Think Big Results, a print and advertising hybrid that utilizes online technologies to create cross-media marketing campaigns.

While other Colorado businesses such as Green Chair Marketing Group and New Media Denver also concentrate on web-based marketing — through website development and email blasts — Think Big uses software designed by **XMPie Inc.**, a New York-based, cross-media solutions provider, as well as technology staple Hewlett-Packard, to provide businesses with customer-specific data analysis, easy-to-track online results, customer-retention planning and multimedia message delivery.

XMPie, which is owned by **Xerox Corp.** but privately operated, began developing cross-media solutions software in 2002. In late 2006, London charity and educational marketing firm SR Communications installed XMPie’s flagship cross-media product, PersonalEffect. In July 2008, international digital print and marketing firm Gimbel & Associates partnered with XMPie, and a month later, Think Big followed suit.

“What Think Big Results is about is developing programs that help enterprise-level companies, ad agencies and small businesses develop tools that can help them communicate more effectively,” Allison said. “In these rough economic times, businesses need to market more to keep the customers that they have, as well as to find new ones. And to do so, they need to make sure they market effectively.”

According to Allison, Think Big is one of the only companies in Colorado to participate in information-driven, cross-media marketing. He said many companies have long used ineffective “drop and spray” marketing techniques, which are large marketing campaigns that send advertising out on a widespread scale, and to a very large demographic.

“Instead of doing these broad, sweeping campaigns, Think Big Results focuses on just the best prospects and the best customers,” Allison said. “It’s about leveraging the data that computers have on customers to create automated communications,” Jones added.

Think Big does so by accessing trigger-based, customer-specific data using an open-source production platform, such as XMPie. Then, by using automated multi-media communication platforms, including print, email, SMS text messaging and various web applications, Think Big can instantaneously relay that data, or any pertinent marketing information, to the very customers who benefit from it most.

Think Big Results is even able to pinpoint exactly what communication platform will appeal the most to individual consumers. For example, Think Big Solutions has several current projects that relay information through a single email that is distributed with variable content (URLs and weblinks), specific to the individual recipients.

“It creates a one-to-one platform that is specific to you and unlike any traditional bulk emails or text messages,” Jones said.

In addition, Think Big Results uses trigger-based data to track purchasing habits of a company’s best customers, and then matches those habits to prospects in larger online and telecommunication markets, in an attempt to gain new customers.



Kathleen Lavine | Business Journal

Mark Jones, director of strategies for Think Big Solutions, and company president Shawn Allison are banking on a new division called Think Big Results to help customers.

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Jones said that Think Big Solutions is directed to three specific types of customers: big businesses that need analysis on large amounts of incoming, trigger-based data; ad agencies which use Think Big's technology to specify direct demographics; and small businesses, which can use features such as Think Big's automated marketing calendars to get a bigger bang for their marketing buck.

Think Big's customer base ranges from nationally-recognized investment and advertising companies to local educational institutions, and even yoga studios.

The New York-based, 85-year-old Bayard Advertising has been a customer of Think Big Solutions for nearly eight years. According to Bayard's Western regional manager, Phil Roberts, what started off as a relationship built around the ad company's print needs has expanded into a need for technology-driven data.

"We've successfully used Think Big for a recent online referral campaign to submit and track referrals, and to build a database for further communications," Roberts said. "They've proven incredibly responsive, intuitive and cost-effective."

Roberts said the referral campaign resulted in more than 600 leads, culminating in the hiring of 20 new employees. He added that Bayard is now equipped with a significant database for sending out follow-up inquiries for future hirings as well.

"Think Big was really vital in the success of that campaign," Roberts said.

According to Allison, Think Big's customer service and reliable staff (22 employees), coupled with modern-era marketing intuition, have kept the company ahead of the technological curve, and thus profitable and timely.

Allison said Think Big's staff, while shrinking in the print department, has expanded on the "creative and strategy side of our business."

The beginning of Think Big's boom began in 2007, when the company's revenue increased 37 percent. Think Big suffered revenue losses in 2008 (10 percent), but has had a 12 percent increase in revenues this year to date, thanks in large part to the Big Solutions division, said Allison.

Broad capabilities, trackable results and maximized marketing expenditures have all been key to Think Big's success, both as a print provider and as a cross-media provider.

But it's the little things that keep Think Big growing.

"What sets us apart is our focus on customers' success and our ability to maximize marketing expenditures and return on investment," Allison said. "Marketing should be an investment, and investments should pay off."

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