



Specialized Marketing Services, Inc. Corporate Backgrounder

Looking through the glass walls of her office into the contemporary lobby of her new 82,000 square foot headquarters, Gloria Robbins can be justifiably proud of her twenty years as a business owner. As a Director of Sales and Marketing with the Walt Disney Company, she had become increasingly frustrated managing the efforts of multiple vendors in direct response marketing campaigns. Communications misfires, accountability issues and duplications of activity were costing too much money and wasting far too much time. She too often found herself in the role of project manager rather than marketing strategist. A streamlined solution was needed. When Gloria searched for the one resource that could reliably deliver a comprehensive end-to-end direct response campaign, none could be found. Specialized Marketing Services, Inc. (SMS) was born.

Gloria Robbins took a bold step in 1988, leaving the comfort and security of her executive position to start SMS. She dreamed of building a full service direct response marketing and fulfillment company that would deliver world class solutions from creative concept all the way through fulfillment, and deliver a measurable ROI that clients could depend on. With little more than relentless determination, a folding table as a desk, a computer and borrowed printer, she spent her days knocking on doors and her nights writing proposals and doing the work. Recruiting her two teenage sons and elderly mother as employees, Gloria set up shop in her spare bedroom and backed the enterprise with everything she had...\$3500 in savings.

Before long SMS outgrew the spare bedroom and leased 900 square feet in a strip mall. When German airline Lufthansa came for a site visit they were astounded to see that the most compelling proposal they received for a major direct response campaign had originated from a tiny family shop. But the airline giant made a leap of faith and hired SMS. 18 years later, they remain a satisfied client, readily praising the unique SMS integrated direct response system.

SMS began to attract more clients as the word spread about its innovative approach to direct response marketing. Soon it needed more space, so in 1995 it moved to a 15,000 square foot building in Irvine, California. She acquired a 35,000 square foot building next door and leased an additional 12,000 square feet. By this time Gloria's sons were fully grown with increasingly responsible roles in operations, her Mom had retired, and SMS had perfected its methodology, merging the art of creative marketing with the science of ROI measurement. SMS specialized in high-tech, travel and leisure and healthcare clients, but when the tragedy of 9/11 severely impacted travel, and with the dotcom bubble burst in 2000, the company lost much of its client base.

Gloria, her family and a few key employees used the experience to take a fresh look at the business, circling the wagons to survive as a new strategy was developed. Specialization was out and "back to basics" was in. Clear strategic thinking and the basic blocking and tackling required to rebuild the business soon won the day, along with a substantial financial commitment by the family. SMS expanded, leasing the building next door and shortly after that leased more space in Santa Ana. Clients such as Samsung, Neutrogena, AAA, Heritage Foods, Pleasant Holidays, LG, Kaiser Permanente and, of course, Lufthansa were captivated by the company's ability to offer everything from strategic planning to award winning design services with a focus on highly targeted, data-driven marketing programs where return-on-investment is both precise and impressive.

An important lesson was learned and has become a critical element in the SMS culture. Today SMS applies zero-based strategic thinking periodically to its own business, in exactly the same way that works so well for its clients. The move to its new headquarters in Santa Ana, California is part of an overall rebranding that signifies the company's evolution to an industry leading model that combines direct marketing with branding and multi-channel communications strategies.

"We stay true to our vision of complete client satisfaction, uncompromised integrity and determination to create and execute the best strategy for our clients and for the employees, family and community we care so much about."

-Gloria Robbins, Founder and Chief Executive Officer

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