

AISD ATSTAR SEEKS OUT VISIONEDGE MARKETING TO SUPPORT CAPITAL ACQUISITION INITIATIVE

THE SITUATION

The ATSTAR program was born out of a Technology-In-Education grant from the Texas Education Agency with the goal of improving and increasing student access to Assistive Technology (AT). "Assistive Technology" is defined as devices or products that are used to maintain or increase the functional capabilities of people with disabilities. ATSTAR, an acronym for Assistive Technology: Strategies, Tools, Accommodations, and Resources, refers to a collaborative effort between seven agencies dedicated to increasing parent, educator, community, and industry awareness of Assistive Technology. This collaborative effort is also bringing Assistive Technology to the classroom and the workforce through a teacher training curriculum that is being developed with the help of teachers from the Austin Independent School District. The ATSTAR organization has two primary goals: to increase awareness of available Assistive Technology to educators and administrators and to provide assessment tools that help teachers and instructional staff identify students with disabilities who can benefit from AT. ATSTAR's approach in empowering teachers with AT expertise is unique, as most schools use either outside experts or a small core of trained personnel to deliver AT.

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THE NEED

TA young non-profit program composed primarily of special educators, ATSTAR needed help in clearly articulating its value proposition in a compelling and meaningful way to the target audiences, including parents, teachers, community members, and potential investors. "We were totally confused as to how to communicate the concepts and importance of Assistive Technology to people who are unfamiliar with it," said Jan McSorley, co-director of ATSTAR. "As educators, we have very little experience working with corporate audiences. We needed to be able to present our cause in a concise and meaningful way, without using a lot of educational lingo."

While the organization has some operating capital, the leadership team wanted to develop materials that would help in securing interest and additional funding from community and corporate sources.

THE PROCESS

ATSTAR looked at the offerings within VisionEdge Marketing's SmartStart Services Suite™ and felt that HeadStart™ would serve them best. Designed for emerging companies and organizations, HeadStart provides basic messaging strategies and communications tools to secure initial interest and buy-in from investors and the target audience.

The process kicked off with an input session that brought the VisionEdge Marketing and ATSTAR teams together to discuss in detail their target audience, the program's unique approach and benefits, and metrics to track ATSTAR's impact and success. There were also several exercises that forced the ATSTAR team to articulate their message concisely and quickly.

Looking at ATSTAR from a marketing perspective was both challenging and rewarding for Jan and her team. "We came to greatly appreciate our sessions with VisionEdge Marketing. They brought a structure to our thinking that forced us to think differently and strategically about our target audiences. We didn't have the experience to think about it in this way," commented Jan.

In addition to the information gathered from the input session and follow-up meetings, VisionEdge Marketing conducted secondary research on Assistive Technology, students with disabilities, and associated laws to support and augment their work.

Jan was concerned that the team's lack of experienced marketers would hinder their efforts to secure partners, collaborators, and investors. ATSTAR began to look for professional marketing help to create strategies that would enable the team to connect with their diverse target audiences and formulate messaging.

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THE DECISION

"We realized that we needed marketing, but we weren't sure how to go about doing that. We decided to seek out a company who could keep us focused," explained Jan. "We juggle a lot of priorities and we needed a firm with drive and structure to help us move forward."

ATSTAR consulted with a community leader who put Jan in contact with VisionEdge Marketing. According to Jan, VisionEdge Marketing understood the problems and parameters from the beginning and moved in the right direction with new ideas and concepts. "The VisionEdge Marketing team was quickly able to discern our situation and our needs. We soon understood why they came so highly recommended."

THE RESULTS

From the HeadStart process, VisionEdge Marketing produced for ATSTAR several marketing tools that clearly communicated ATSTAR's value – a slide presentation, boilerplate description, and basic message map that provided several key messages and their supporting data. These tools were immediately put to use in ATSTAR's grant applications and meetings with their target audiences. "VisionEdge Marketing delivered tangible results very quickly. They provided us presentation tools and research that we can drop directly into our grants, saving us work, time, and money. Most recently we used their material in meetings with key individuals in Washington, DC, and the information and message was very well-received," praised Jan.

"Just as important as the actual tools was the increased comfort and confidence with marketing that we gained working with VisionEdge Marketing," added Jan. The ATSTAR team came away knowing their program's values and benefits and how to articulate them to their targets. "The model VisionEdge Marketing helped us to develop is impactful - people connect with it immediately," said Jan. "We wouldn't have come up with the way we are communicating today without them."

What ultimately led Metrowerks to select VisionEdge Marketing over the other candidates was the company's focus on process and metrics.

"VisionEdge Marketing explained exactly how our companies would work together, and their approach fit well with ours," said John.

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ABOUT VISIONEDGE MARKETING

About VisionEdge Marketing
Headquartered in Austin, Texas, VisionEdge Marketing, Inc., is the leader in metrics-based marketing with an emphasis on moving and keeping clients on the highly desirable short list. The company provides complete strategic marketing services, especially in the areas of branding, positioning, market research and strategy, and product and company rollouts. SmartStart Suite™, a strategically-tactical™ service bundle, designed to build and maximize valuation, is used by clients to develop positioning, influence purchasing behavior, and drive demand. For more information, visit www.visionedgemarketing.com

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