

Case study: Clockwork Active Media

Nancy Lyons, along with her partners Chuck Hermes, Michael Koppelman and Kurtis Koppelman, founded Clockwork Active Media in 2002. Since then the Minneapolis-based technology company has grown to \$8 million in annual revenue and more than 70 employees. Lyons entered the Hennepin-Anoka-Carver-Ramsey-Scott (HCARS) Economic Gardening Program in 2014 looking for information to help Clockwork expand into new geographic markets.

The program's National Strategic Research Team (NSRT) identified a list of more than 450 companies with revenues of \$100 million or more (the size company that Clockwork typically targets) along with specific contact names. "A lot of our competitors are looking for new clients on the East or West coasts," Lyons says. "Yet the research team was able to point us to companies that fit our criteria and were much closer to home — within a 250-mile radius."

The research team also gave Lyons insights in how to pursue prospective customers more strategically.



Nancy Lyons, co-founder of Clockwork Active Media, with Jay Haase, one of the company's software engineers.

"Telling our story is difficult because of the breadth and depth of our capabilities," Lyons says, explaining that Clockwork creates solutions across multiple business functions. This includes anything from building complex websites that integrate with back-end legacy systems to developing mobile applications for coupons, promotions and loyalty programs. Within Clockwork's expansive portfolio, the NSRT identified problem solving as a core competency. "They helped us see that instead of selling our approach to customers, we want to be very specific about the problems we're being asked to solve," Lyons says. Other takeaways included:

- Pursuing healthcare, financial services and consumer packaged goods companies. Clockwork has worked in these industries in the past, but customers came as referrals. Now the company is armed with information to be more proactive.
- Learning industry lingo of prospects. "Most people who buy technology solutions have no idea what they're buying, which put the onus on us to use language they understand," Lyons says. "By focusing on specific vertical markets, we can develop appropriate sales language to position our products."
- Emphasizing Clockwork's value proposition. In most cases, Clockwork is pitching its services to mid-level managers, who often want to go with a large vendor like Oracle because it seems like

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a safe decision. “The NSRT helped me realize I need to communicate our strengths as a smaller company, such as the ability to be more nimble,” Lyons says.

In addition to working with the NSRT, participants in the HCARS Economic Gardening Program are also eligible to join a roundtable comprised of second-stage CEOs in noncompeting industries. In her roundtable, Lyons was introduced to Traction, Gino Wickman’s entrepreneurial operation system. This prompted her to sit down with her management team and formally articulate Clockwork’s mission, vision and values.

“Now that I have more than 70 employees, I no longer have the chance to talk to everyone on a daily basis, which has resulted in people putting their own spin on how they talk to clients,” Lyons says. “Putting our vision and values down on paper gives us a razor-like focus in how we tell our story and sell our products. It keeps us on the same page.”

“As a business owner, you get caught up in driving sales and keeping the lights on,” Lyons adds. “Economic Gardening has helped me step back, look at my company really objectively and identify where we could make some significant improvements.”

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