

Success Story: Treece Phillips LLC

Treece Phillips LLC combines the talents and experience of Brian Treece and Mary Phillips. The result is a communications firm that is getting the message across for an impressive group of clients. JCBT editor Sandy Selby recently sat down with Phillips and Treece to talk about the challenges and rewards of working in the communications field.

JCBT: Tell us a little about the history of your firm.

Treece Phillips: The members of Treece Phillips have more than 20 years combined experience spanning the areas of marketing, political science, community development, grassroots lobbying and journalism. But we all share one key strength - the ability to communicate persuasively. We believe these diverse experiences stimulate creativity, inspire ideas and yield superior results. Treece Phillips has cultivated extraordinary relationships and access to decision-makers, opinion leaders and media in Missouri. Our reputation is predicated upon accuracy, integrity and just plain hard work.

JCBT: What services do you offer to your clientele?

Treece Phillips: Treece Phillips delivers strategic communications services - message development, issue research, public relations, media training and crisis communications - to a wide spectrum of national, regional and local clients.

Our services include staffing clients at critical meetings such as with President George W. Bush and senior advisor Karl Rove; Vice President Al Gore; as well as U.S. senators and representatives; guiding CEOs in newspaper editorial board meetings; crafting powerful public relations messages; media training and handling the government relations needs of large corporations. In addition, we have served as paid consultants to over 50 candidate and issue campaigns.

JCBT: What type of businesses need your services?

Treece Phillips: Every individual or corporation that depends upon a strong public reputation needs our unique communication services to sell products and ideas, revalue share price, create positive impressions in government, and attract and motivate the best employees.

To be successful, companies not only have to respond to change, but also have to take advantage of it, to carve out a distinct, memorable identity for themselves amongst a variety of audiences, customers, investors, suppliers, government, as well as current and future employees.

JCBT: How large is your firm?

Treece Phillips: We like to say we're the small firm with big clients. Treece



Phillips has strategic affiliations with key vendors that we access on an as-needed, project-by-project basis. This conservative management style and low overhead allows Treece Phillips to deliver overall better services with less expense to clients. We believe this helps make wise use of precious client resources.

Over the last 12 years, we have been fortunate to be located in three historic properties: initially, the Marmaduke House then the Lohman Opera House and now the renovated Porth House.

JCBT: Introduce our readers to some of your key staff members and tell us why they are an asset to your business.

Treece Phillips: Brian Treece has distinguished himself by applying creative, persuasive communications strategies to public affairs challenges in disparate environments. As president of Visions Communications Group Inc. from 1993-2002, Treece worked on scores of issues including health care, environment, law enforcement, technology, education and economic development issues. He is a frequent consultant to candidates and corporations, including governors and Fortune 500 CEOs alike.

He has developed a unique niche in the public affairs arena by designing and implementing public affairs strategies that take full advantage of all opportunities. His experiences range from government relations to crisis communications to community relations with prominent success in candidate campaigns, ballot issues and grassroots lobbying.

He's a graduate of the university of Missouri-Columbia where he studied political science and journalism and has more than 12 years experience in public relations and communications.

Mary Phillips specializes in corporate communications, media relations, and

designing and implementing government and public relations strategies. Working closely with CEOs and government officials, Phillips has successfully secured government contract extensions and negotiated innovative settlements. She also trains corporate executives in media response techniques, crisis communication and corporate message development, especially in highly regulated and consumer-sensitive industries.

She was the president of Phillips Consulting, an administrative and organizational consulting firm. She served as Springfield, Missouri's ambassador to its sister city of Isesaki, Japan. In Japan, Phillips was a commissioned city official responsible for official appearances and protocols, educational presentations and promotion of international relations.

She has a master's degree in public administration with an emphasis in government affairs from the University of Missouri-Columbia. She has served on the board of directors of several not-for-profits, including the Jefferson City Area Chamber of Commerce, RiverCity Habitat for Humanity, Missouri Council for In-Home Services, and the Greater Missouri Leadership Foundation.

JCBT: What sets you apart from your competition?

Treece Phillips: Treece Phillips is distinct from other firms and agencies in that we don't divide our accounts - we divide our workload. Each member of Treece Phillips has specific talents, and we emphasize those talents. So not only does our best writer always write your copy, our best minds research potential constraints, our best strategists plan your approach, but each of us know the details of your project and we interact closely to produce superior results.

JCBT: How much time do you spend educating yourselves about the issues that you'll be communicating for your clients?

Treece Phillips: To craft an effective message, we must understand the challenges and issues facing our clients as we have to understand what their consumers, shareholders and constituents are sensitive to. That sometimes takes a great deal of work. Clients hire us because we have the expertise that they don't. They'll say "We own a football team. How do we get public financing for an arena? How do we get the public that doesn't like football to support that?" For our clients, it is more economically feasible to hire consultants like us to apply these disparate techniques to an environment where seemingly a grassroots component doesn't exist.

JCBT: What are some of the common misconceptions about your work?

Treece Phillips: A lot of people believe we're just another lobbying firm. In fact, government relations represents only a small portion of our firm's account load. We are often retained to provide media training to executives, handle ongoing rapid response for companies at risk of crisis, build marketing campaigns, and develop communications plans for new products and corporate reputation management. We develop innovative strategies to persuade decision-makers but also the media, voters and the general public.

JCBT: Did the high rate of turnover in the state legislature present any challenges to your lobbying efforts?

Treece Phillips: Not a challenge so much as an opportunity to use new strategies to persuade the decision-makers. When you have a majority of freshman legislators, there is an opportunity to use more creative strategies. It's no longer a reliance upon wining and dining, but we're able to use editorials, direct mail, traditional radio advertising to market ideas to this new legislature. We are nationally known for our creative mail and radio pieces. So far it's been very effective and I think we're the only firm that concentrates on that form of persuasion.

JCBT: What is the secret to your success?

Treece Phillips: Our firm measures its success by its clients' satisfaction. Treece Phillips believes our success - like success in other walks of life - has its roots in sound organization, thoughtful planning, unceasing cooperation, imaginative liaison, constant surveillance, and just plain hard work. A disciplined and focused approach to prominent and successful outcomes ensures that a client's investment of trust and resources are well spent. ♦