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Q&A with Piera Palazzolo, SVP of Dale Carnegie Training

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One of the new tracks at [SES New York 2009](#) was focused on “Search & the C-Level Executive.” As I pointed this out during the “First Timer’s Guide to SES and SEM” session, I was asked what a C-level executive was. I quipped it was any executive who could keep his or her head above water in this economy. No one got the joke.

Seriously, a C-level executive is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Operating Officer (COO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Chief Marketing Officer (CMO), Chief Technical Officer (CTO), Chief Learning Officer (CLO) or any of the other chiefs that us Native American Indians report to.

But it’s noteworthy that some search engine marketing (SEM) specialists, search engine optimization (SEO) consultants, and pay-per-click (PPC) advertisers aren’t familiar with business jargon like “C-level.” Hey, it’s a search term that costs \$2.19 a click.

Apparently, some of us have been burried so deeply in our organizations that we don’t talk the talk of the “C-suite”, another search term that costs \$1.39 a click. But that was changing before the recession, which is now in its 16th month, although it has rapidly accelerated as executives revised our budgets during the most severe recession in 70 years.

Today, all of us in the search engine marketing industry need to talk the talk of the C-suite and walk the walk of calculating our marketing return on investment (ROI). That’s why Search Engine Strategies added the “Search & the C-Level Exectuve” track.

One of the sessions in the track was entitled, “Implementing a Digital Corporate Governance Program.” When I was asked during the “First Timer’s Guide to SES and SEM” session what that would cover, I had to lamely explain, “Hey, that’s why I come to SES events: To learn things that I didn’t know already.”

Nevertheless, I vowed to find out what “Implementing a Digital Corporate Governance Program” was all about by interviewing Piera Palazzolo, Senior Vice President of Dale Carnegie Training, who was one of the speakers at the session.

[Dale Carnegie Training](#) is the oldest training company in the world, originally based on Dale Carnegie’s world famous best seller: “How to Win Friends and Influence People.” Dale Carnegie has 200 offices, both franchised and company owned, in over 70 countries on six continents.

As its first woman senior executive, Mrs. Palazzolo joined the Company in 1993 and was elected to the Senior Leadership Team in 2002. Previously, she was VP of Account Services at J. Walter Thompson (JWT). During her tenure at JWT, Mrs. Palazzolo oversaw both consumer and business to business accounts. In 1986, she helped launch Prodigy — a pioneering company in online services. She serviced a variety of marketers including GE Capital and Ford Motor Company.

Over the last 15 years Mrs. Palazzolo has overseen the company’s foray into online marketing, print and radio advertising and direct mail and sales support. Here are my questions and her answers:

Q: First of all, Piera, tells us a little bit about Dale Carnegie Training.

A: “Dale Carnegie partners with middle market and large corporations, as well as organizations, to produce measurable business results by improving the performance of employees with emphasis on leadership, sales, team member engagement, customer service, presentations, process improvement and other essential management skills. Recently identified by The Wall Street Journal as one of the top 25 high-performing franchises, the Dale Carnegie Training programs are available in more than 25 languages throughout the entire United States and in more than 75 countries. Dale Carnegie includes as its clients 400 of the Fortune 500 companies. Approximately 7 million people have experienced Dale Carnegie Training.”

Q: I understand that you are migrating your marketing efforts from print to digital media. Can you tell us what Dale Carnegie Training is doing?

A: “Paid Search, Organic SEO. Paid search and organic SEO have proved to be the most cost effective way of driving leads online. We also use e-mail marketing to the leads we generate which has been very successful.”

Q: As companies migrate their marketing efforts online, can the costs of implementing an effective program skyrocket quickly if a proper governance program is not in place?

A: “Yes, when dealing with multiple business units it is imperative that a governance program is in place to prevent duplication of effort and cannibalization of terms in paid search. In order to maximize budget a centralized approach has worked well for Dale Carnegie and allows us to provide very strategic marketing support to our franchisees.”

Q: What can companies that have multiple business units or franchisees do to avoid the common pitfalls of cannibalization of budget and dilution of brand?

A: “Implement a corporate governance program and enforce it. It serves no useful purpose to run multiple campaigns with the same goals and compete against yourself.”

Q: What are some of best practices for implementing a governance program that coordinates marketing efforts and optimizes budget across lines of business, geographic regions and organizational “fiefdoms”?

A: “Dale Carnegie has been in business for over 96 years and has always believed that a centralized marketing approach with clear brand messaging and guidelines works best. We simply took that same belief and strategy to the Web and have not run into some of the problems other major brands have faced in their online migration.”