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Sector : Management Consulting
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Number of Employees : 1
Website : www.frielconsulting.com



“Consultancy in New Normal”

FRIEL CONSULTING

“We will continue to use Zoom post-pandemic as it is nice to ‘see’ who you are talking to” - Stephen Friel

Crisis:

Client Engagement & Market Management

About

Friel Consulting Ltd was established by Stephen Friel in 2004. The company offers a range of business support, services and training solutions to local business, community organisations and government agencies. Stephen is also an accredited mediator and has successfully worked with a diverse range of clients. This includes liaising with a number of associates in other specialist areas such as IT support and financial planning. Clients are offered an all-encompassing business advisory service that offers guidance on every phase of the business lifecycle from ideation and inception to start-up and scaling. Key clients include Enterprise Ireland, Invest NI and the Local Enterprise Boards. Typically, training is delivered to groups but is also available to individual companies in a coaching/mentoring capacity.

Background

Traditionally the company would have engaged directly with clients – either in face-to-face meetings with individuals for coaching/mentoring; or in a traditional classroom/lecture theatre environment to deliver training. This was made impossible by lock-down restrictions, group capacity guidelines and social distancing measures that were brought in under emergency circumstances in the initial stages of the pandemic and then later legislated.



This meant that the company could no longer operate under 'business-as-usual' and was forced to find alternate solutions to the crisis or risk lying dormant for an unknown amount of time. As it became apparent, after the first wave of the pandemic and moving into the second wave, reduced and eased restrictions provided no assurances. Restrictions could be reinstated at any time, with little to zero notice. This prevented the organisation's capacity to plan any future meetings and training in coming weeks and months. This would greatly impact the company's current revenue, future revenue and ability to survive the crisis. New methods of engaging clients, delivering training and ensuring business continuity for the entirety of the pandemic and any similar crises that may occur in the future. Pre-Pandemic the company utilised email and telephone communications to set up meetings and training events. Pre-Covid, the company had never delivered any client engagement virtually. However, the company did use ebanking and for payments from clients via online banking.

Digital Tools

Online Meeting Platforms: **Zoom, MS Teams**

Online Survey Platforms: **Survey Monkey**

Instant Messaging: **WhatsApp, Messenger**



Methodology

When the pandemic emerged in Ireland in March/April 2020, surprisingly the company experienced an immediate upturn in business as the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) in both Donegal and a neighboring county, Sligo, engaged the company for assistance. The organisation was solicited to the company to assist with a substantial quantity of 'Telephone Pandemic Business Audits'. The Government, via the LEOs offered SMEs Trading Online Vouchers (TOVs) to assist SMEs upgrade their online presence (due to the pandemic) and Friel Consulting were utilised to oversee the grant process. This generated significant unforeseen business for the company, but also required for the organisation to adapt its customer engagement methods so that it could meet with clients and deliver training with a virtual method. Subsequently, the company subscribed to Zoom for a business account

which would accommodate any current and future training to commence without any impact from government guidelines and restrictions. Virtual meeting and training via Zoom or MS Teams now accounts for 90% of all client engagement. The pandemic provided opportunity based on the organisation's area of specialty, it also allowed the company to generate increased revenue and reduced costs for travel to and from meetings & training. The only disadvantage would be the lack of physical interaction may potentially impact the depth of trainee/mentee engagement in training and their comprehension of the topics delivered. Online training in a group setting does not allow for organic questions, interaction, engagement and peer-to-peer support and connections that occur during physical sessions.

Conclusion

Post pandemic, the organisation will continue to utilise Zoom for meetings and delivery of training. It is clear that it is much more advantageous than relying on phone calls as it is nice to 'see' who you are speaking to. It is preferable to deliver training and meetings in person, but for limited interactions or brief meetings where the client may be 100+ miles away, virtual meetings are an obvious solution, with and reduced travel time and costs. As a company specialising on business support & advice for SMEs, with main clients such as statutory agencies / government bodies, there has been no reduced revenue due to the pandemic. Actually, it may have generated slightly more income as governments have increased training / mentoring supports for SMEs, growing the customer base