

A Capstone Conversation With The 2011 Rookie of the Year



Emily Alexandria Burns
e-Marketing and Communications Specialist
Freed Maxick & Battaglia CPAs



CAPSTONE MARKETING

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Jean Caragher: Welcome to the latest Capstone Conversation with Emily Burns, the e-Marketing and Communications Specialist at Freed Maxick & Battaglia CPAs in Buffalo, New York. Emily was awarded the 2011 Association for Accounting Marketing Rookie of the Year Award.

Emily has been with Freed Maxick & Battaglia for the past one and a half years. She comes to them after working in the PR departments of several beauty and fashion companies including Avon Products, Christian Dior Couture, Giorgio Armani and Jones Apparel Group where Emily immersed herself within the women's apparel accessories and beauty markets, including learning strategic PR tactics. Emily's education is from the Fashion Institute of Technology. This is another interesting background for someone who winds up in accounting marketing. Emily's last position in New York City was corporate communications manager for ID Media, the largest direct response and digital media services company in the United States. Emily became familiar with the latest media tactics in DRTV online and emerging media. She also helped increase the company's awareness within the industry and generated a substantial boost in press coverage in national advertising and media trade publications. Then, Emily found her way back to Buffalo and to Freed Maxick & Battaglia and to the Association for Accounting Marketing. Emily, welcome, and how does it feel to be Rookie of the Year?

Emily Burns: It feels awesome. It is so surprising because I was up against so many quality nominees and, at the end of the day, I just feel so incredibly rewarded. It's such an honour to get that from my peers within the accounting marketing industry. It makes me feel like after this last year and a half I have done a good job and I'm very proud of that. So it makes me feel great.

Jean Caragher: Well, you should be proud of that because I know you and your team are doing a fabulous job for your firm. What factors do you think enable you to be successful at your firm?

Emily Burns: Well, first and foremost, I have a phenomenal mentor in my manager, Eric Majchrzak. He's fairly well-known within the accounting marketing industry – does a lot of interviews and sits on panels and takes part in discussion groups and so forth. He's been a big part in encouraging me and driving me to use the education and the talents that I have here at Freed Maxick, always willing to listen to new ideas and get me



excited about doing the job that I do. He really trusts me to take the lead on a lot of our projects and initiatives because he knows that I have that creativity. He knows that I have the ability and the experience to do it. Having somebody who really trusts you to do things correctly and execute really big programs and strategies, it makes you feel good. It makes you want to do well. Also, of course, the directors here are really supportive and they certainly recognize the value and the quality of having good marketing and public relations. I think they also really value all of the marketing team members.

Jean Caragher: I imagine that that is just part of your culture because, as we know, not all CPAs embrace marketing. But if you have a marketing culture, that must help the relationship between the marketers and the partners and your ability to be creative and to implement new ideas.

Emily Burns: I definitely think so. One of the most important things for us to do is show value, especially when a lot of the directors or professional staff may not completely understand what it is that we do. When we're able to show value or show that something worked or show that there were positive results, and it's not always being able to quantify it by saying that we gained new business, but perhaps it's just telling the story of a new relationship that was created or a great press opportunity. When we're able to show our value that definitely helps them be very supportive of us.

Jean Caragher: Do you report that value on a regular basis? How do you inform them about what's going on in marketing?

Emily Burns: Oh, I definitely take my past experience working for ID Media as a corporate communications manager and publicizing all of the great things that we do, all of the success that we've had, the positive things that we've done in the community or with different campaigns internally so that people are kept up to date and know what we're up to. So that's maybe an e-mail blast that goes out to all of our three offices or maybe a great press release is posted on our internet. Maybe it's just sitting in one of our update meetings and talking about something exciting that happened or something positive that we saw come out of a campaign. Keeping everybody informed as to what we're up to so that they know and so that, perhaps, if somebody asks them about something that they saw, they can speak intelligently about it and know a little bit about what the marketing department is doing.

Jean Caragher: What is your most surprising discovery about accounting marketing? You come from the fashion industry. You come from a media company in New York City. What's been the most surprising thing?



Emily Burns: I think the most surprising thing is that here at our firm the culture is very accepting of new technology and trying new things, thinking outside of the box, being creative. I really never would have expected that. And, again, I think that comes a lot with showing value and having the people within our department in places that are very, very good at what they do. I never really would have expected a CPA firm to be into mobile or into social networking or open to doing things very creatively. When I first got into it, just looking around, I saw a lot of the same things. So that was very surprising to me here and I think that's probably why I'm really enjoying what I'm doing because it is that very positive culture here.

Jean Caragher: What intrigued you about interviewing at a CPA firm?

Emily Burns: Well, to be honest, I didn't. It was one of those situations where I was a passive jobseeker. Before this position with Freed Maxick I worked with our local Chamber of Commerce organization. That organization, of course, supports all of the businesses regionally here in Buffalo Niagara, advocates for them in Albany and does a lot of professional development networking type things, as well. I had a relationship with Freed Maxick as one of the members of the organization. It so happened that they were looking for somebody that needed to have a unique blend of both very traditional marketing experience, a bit of public relations, somebody who is aware of social media tools and how to use them effectively within the business environment. I was just interested to see what they had to say, what the opportunity was going to look like and what they were looking for somebody to do here. Being intrigued with it and wanting to see what the opportunity was exactly brought me in.

Jean Caragher: Well, Eric tells me that when you interviewed, you actually interviewed him more than he interviewed you. Is that true?

Emily Burns: I probably did. I lived down in New York for a long time and I spent most of my adult life there, all of my friendships were there and it was very, very scary for me to move back to Buffalo because I was leaving everybody that I knew, and, yes, I was coming back home to my family and what was comfortable, but I was very scared because the job market here is quite different than it is in a large city. I was afraid that maybe I would come back and I would not have that job security, or I wouldn't like what I was doing and would be limited to what I could do. I think that's probably why I was asking so many questions, because I wanted to make sure that it was something that I was going to like. I was going to be able to do well. I was going to have some job security because making that big life change for me was a huge, big deal. And luckily everything has, so far, worked out very well.

Jean Caragher: It sounds like it is. What is your biggest challenge in what you do now?



Emily Burns: I think the biggest challenge is staying on top of what's new and what tools are out there. I think that we have done such a great job positioning ourselves as thought leaders within the industry. However, that really puts the onus on us to continue to be aware of what's available, whatever tools are new, how we can implement them here internally; doing a lot of reading, participating in different events, talking to people outside of our industry to see what they're doing as well. I think that's a big challenge because we want to stay ahead of the curve and we want to continue to be thought leaders but that really means that we need to put ourselves out there to learn and see what's going on.

Jean Caragher: There is so much information out there now, isn't there? It's nearly impossible to keep up. So as the 2011 AAM Rookie of the Year, what is your best piece of advice for accounting marketers?

Emily Burns: Exploring professional development opportunities are really important. I'm really lucky here that if I see something, whether it be an industry or trade group or maybe a class I want to take, I voice that. I'm allowed to go and really explore professional development opportunities. And AAM, of course, is an amazing place to start – the people that you meet, the discussions that you have, all the different things that are available are very, very helpful. I'm also suggesting PRSA, which is the Public Relations Society of America. There are local chapters everywhere. Your area might have a young professionals group which, for me, I'm involved in one here in Buffalo and that's extremely helpful and fun. Your local Chamber of Commerce perhaps has networking opportunities that would be really great. Here in Buffalo we are very, very active in our social media club and there are a lot of really cool, innovative, creative people that inspire us to do really neat things. So exploring professional development is key. Going along with that, never be afraid to ask for help in your professional development whether it be continuing your education or attending a networking event. If you don't ask, you might not get to do something or you might miss out on an opportunity. So I think it never hurts to ask so that you want to show that you are willing to keep learning and developing. And you want to really prove your value within your firm or your department. Again, staying abreast of what's going on – what's new, what's cool, what's hip, who's finding success using different tools – whether they're in our industry or not, I think it's always interesting to see what other people are up to and how you can potentially translate it to what you do. So I, for instance, read a ton of different blogs and websites. I'm always checking out ad campaigns, just seeing what everybody else is up to so I can get creative with how I market here with our firm. Figure out how I can apply it to what we do. So never stop learning. That's probably the most important thing. Keep learning, improving your skills, stay fresh. Those are all big buzz words but, I think, would be my best advice.



Jean Caragher: Emily, you are one of the new faces of AAM. Congratulations again on being named the AAM 2011 Rookie of the Year. Thanks for your time today for the *Capstone Conversation*.

Emily Burns: Thank you very much for having me.

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