



START UP

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Name of company:

Furia Rubel Communications Inc.

Owner: Gina Furia Rubel

Location: A renovated barn in Doylestown.

Description of company: We provide strategic planning and public relations services to professional service, educational and nonprofit industries. Our niche is in legal communications.

‘PR is just like practicing law.’

Age of company: Three-and-a-half years.

No. of employees: Two full time; five part time.

Owner’s education: Drexel University, bachelor’s degree in corporate communications; Widener University School of Law, juris doctor.

Owner’s prior experience: I began my PR career while a student at Drexel where I served as a director of communications for Almo Electronics in Philadelphia, as an assistant editor at Physician’s News Digest and as the SunDragon II (Drexel’s Solar Car) PR director and spokesperson. I went on to law school at Widener and then served as a judicial law clerk for the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas. In 1996, I was nominated by the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania to work on a disciplinary board hearing committee where I served for six years. The experience gave me a better knowledge and understanding of the ethical implications of legal communications which is something I’m now known for nationally.

After that, I went into private practice for a few years but no matter what I did, public relations was always calling. In 1999, I joined a video-on-demand startup company as their in-house counsel and communications director. From there, I worked for three local agencies where I learned how an agency was run. In 2002, I ventured out on my own and subcontracted with an events firm to serve as an event manager for the Dad Vail Regatta. By that June, I incorporated Furia Rubel and have never looked back.

How did you first perceive a need/opportunity? The pie is shrinking for attorneys across the country – but especially in Philadelphia. If attorneys don’t communicate their message proactively, they might as well stop practicing law. I knew this going into law school and knew attorneys would need to do public relations – at the time, I just didn’t know I’d be doing it for them. By way of background, my family has been in the practice of law in Philadelphia for more than 75 years. My grandfather was an attorney and the first Italian-American magistrate to serve on the federal bench. My father Richard Furia took over his father’s legal practice and I followed. Today there are more than 14,000 attorneys in Philadelphia all vying for much of the same business. If attorneys and other professional service providers don’t proactively communicate with their target audiences, the business just won’t come.

What made you decide to start your own business? Motherhood was the deciding factor for me to start my own business. After our daughter got very sick and was hospitalized I lost a week from work. A supervisor chastised me, which sent me on my quest for financial freedom and supervisory independence. Within a few weeks, I launched Furia Rubel.

STARTUP: Founder's experience as a lawyer was the bedrock for her PR company

How high was your anxiety? I was nervous about the lack of a defined income and the need to invest in the company but it soon became apparent that it was the best business decision I had ever made.

How did friends and family influence you: I am extremely blessed to have such a supportive family and network of friends. I joined The Women's Business Forum of Bucks County.

Who or what is your competition? There are many great public relations firms and consultants in the region, both large and small, however, none niche in the legal industry with a trained and licensed lawyer steering the ship.

What was your biggest hurdle? Explaining why I switched careers. My answer: Public relations is just like practicing law. You're communicating a targeted message to a targeted audience to elicit a specific response. It's only the venue and persuasive techniques that have changed.

What turned out to be easier than you thought? Getting clients.

What lessons have you learned about investing resources? There must be a fine balance between investing in your staff, your firm's technology, marketing, advertising, public relations and new business development.

Has your role changed? Since we hired our first full-time account coordinator, I have been able to work on developing business a bit more. Regardless, I'll always have my hands in the work one way or the other. I enjoy what we do. I enjoy strategizing; I enjoy being a part of our clients' teams; and I enjoy working with the media.

How do you see your role changing as the company grows? I anticipate my role to become more of a mentor and rainmaker and less of the tactician. However, it's like being an artist; it's the art of public relations that I enjoy and I have no intentions of giving that up.

Was there one moment of relief, when you thought, "Yes! This will work!" Our first week in business, I contacted my first agency employer, Roska Direct, and told Jon Roska that I was launching my own public relations firm. I knew that the business would be a success when Jon asked me, "When can we get started?"

What is your long-range outlook? My long-range outlook is to grow the business by 15 percent to 25 percent each year while hiring one full-time account coordinator every 12 to 18 months. That way, we will be able to promote from within, provide solid training and maintain a sustainable environment.

How big would you like to get? Furia Rubel will be a \$50 million dollar agency by the time I'm 50. The good news is, I have plenty of time (and patience) until we get there!

Finally, have any words of wisdom for others? First, believe and you will succeed. Second, systematize, systematize, systematize: Read the book, "The E-Myth Revisited" by Michael Gerber and practice what he preaches. Third, be consistent with your company's message: State who you are and what you do in every mode of communication. Fourth, accept that you have to wear a lot of hats when you start out and take them off one at a time so that when all is said and done, you're left wearing the one you like most. Remember that to think about failure is to invite failure and to think about success is to experience it. ■■