

Lewis Leaves Advertising for Consulting



Long-time advertising guru John Lewis (sitting) has started another company to help clients master financial efficiency. He is pictured here with partners Jim Sealy (left) and son Tripp Lewis (right).

At an age when most people are counting down the days to retirement, **John Lewis** is in his office eager to discuss his newest business endeavor.

Lewis and his two partners — son **Tripp Lewis** and **Jim Sealy** — have taken advertising agency Lewis Communications' practice of analyzing expenses and are turning it into an expense reduction consulting business, Lewis & Associates LLC.

All three have made a career at the advertising firm John's father, **John Lewis Sr.**, started in 1951. **John Jr.** served as president and CEO of Lewis Communications until he turned over the reigns to his business partner, **Larry Norris**, a few years ago. He still sits on the agency's board of directors. Tripp and Sealy hold dual roles with both companies, with Tripp concentrating on new business development and Sealy serving as the chief financial officer.

It was Sealy who first planted the seed for the business. He knew the expense reduction techniques used to keep the agency competitive and consistently ranked among the nation's best in business practices with the American Association of Advertising Agencies could become another service for clients. But Lewis saw the opportunity to instead form a new company. After 18 months in business, the company has recommended more than \$2 million in cost-saving practices to its clients.

At first, a few good friends relented to let the new Lewis team dig for cost-saving measures. John remembers one friend saying, "We're good friends. I'll let you come out, but you won't find anything."

But they did find ways to save one of their first clients, Gulf City Body & Trailer Works, money. An endorsement letter from this satisfied customer helped confirm the company's client list would grow.

"What they saved us was unbelievable," said **Barry Gritter**, CEO of Gulf City Body & Trailer Works. Gritter said his company adopted about 50 percent of the recommendations, although the specifics could not be disclosed because of a confidentiality statement signed between the two parties before the analysis began.

A number of Mobile's mainstay businesses and nonprofit organizations have employed the group and written their own letters of endorsement and now serve as references.

That's what convinced **Robb Cunningham**, president of Benchmark Homes, to give them a try. "It doesn't hurt anyone to let them take a look at how your company could run better. They really saved us a substantial amount of money." Cunningham added that the company's commitment continued after the "deal was done by checking regularly on progress and

trying to find even more ways to save money."

As a result, he wrote his own letter of recommendation: "When John Lewis initially contacted me to discuss their expense reduction services, I was skeptical if they would really help Benchmark Homes. . . I was surprised at their finds, and we have implemented the majority of their recommendations."

"Every company on the consulting service's prospect list is a well-run, profiting business," said John. Tripp added, he believes as the economy changes their system will be even more valuable.

The team made it clear that while its services include cash flow studies, banking/finance advice, payroll processing, telecommunications evaluation and insurance recommendations, they do not tell owners and managers how to run their office. The team stays away from personnel review and does not encourage businesses to switch from current vendors.

"We just help them take advantage of the savings they could be making, helping great companies become even more profitable," said John.

"Lots of consultants look at personnel," said Tripp. "But we are honing in on expenses."

Sealy added, "The ability to reduce operation costs is as important as taking sales from \$10,000 to \$100,000."

There's no up-front fee and no out-of-pocket expense unless the client accepts the cost-savings strategies. Potential savings categories include banking, credit cards, retirement plans, employer-paid benefits, office supplies, mail management, solid waste management and estate planning.

Lewis & Associates works with corporations, nonprofit organizations and family-owned companies that have 10 or more employees. "By analyzing and shopping for savings, they (clients) can work on what they're best suited to do," said Sealy.

In only a few hours, clients pull a variety of records for review. The process can last a few days or a few weeks. And the results are aimed at finding 5 to 10 percent savings in long-term, cost-effective solutions on non-payroll operating expenses that will make their clients money as soon as they are put into practice.

In the end, John Lewis admits this job has fewer pressures than the public relations and marketing communications business. He finds time to work out every morning and plays golf every Wednesday and Friday.

For more information on Lewis & Associates, call 476-2507.