

AN ENERGIZED PARTNER

TOD POWERS FORWARD WITH ELECTRICITY AND INNOVATION

By **Bruce** Christian

A telecom industry innovator has sent an electric surge through the industry by first migrating itself into a telemarketing master agent and now as a power company. Telecommunications On Demand Inc. (TOD), founded in 1994 by Jeff Bornstein as a telecom master agency, continues offering its telecom services with a different business model than your average master agent. It now also owns and operates Great American Power LLC, a retail energy supplier providing power to more than 20,000 customers in Illinois, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania and Texas.

“Our goal with Great American Power is to reach out to telecom master agents, like WTG [World Telecom Group],” Bornstein states, explaining that the agent channel can work as effectively for power as it has for telecom. “We will make a major outreach and point out that they already have a solid book of business they can use to offer and to sell energy. We are looking to get feet on the street through the telecom master agent channel. We will also sign up individual agents and energy brokers.”

The migration to power made sense to Bornstein, who serves as chairman of TOD. It was a direction also supported by other company principals, Justin Olds, CEO, and Chris Bonavita, president and COO. Business wise, they recognized that telecom simply doesn’t offer the opportunity it once did.

“The telemarketing telecom channel has gotten ugly,” says Bornstein. “So it made sense to diversify.

“When telecom was the big game in town, it was selling long distance, but it became a ruse, especially with the advent of telemarketing long distance,” he continues. “Telemarketers were misrepresenting the product, and it wound up getting distorted. So when the bubble burst [2000-2002] most companies using telemarketers were blown out of the water.”

Back in the day, it was all about revenue, not margin, says Bornstein.

“The long distance resellers really didn’t care. It was ‘Do what you want; say what you want’, but keep the regulatory heat away.”

At TOD, however, Bornstein says his company built a reputation for being good at what it does, which is to function as a B2B, B2C “performance-based” telesales, consulting and management company that provides full outbound and inbound services.

TOD’s Outbound & Inbound Services

- Sales and marketing
- Customer service
- Content moderation
- Internet marketing
- Program development
- Total project management
- Lead generation and appointment setting
- Polling and surveys
- Win backs/retention
- Up sells/cross sells



INSIDE THE TOD CALL CENTER

TOD is good at recognizing market changes. That's why it began marketing energy a decade ago. Bornstein explains that Olds brought the idea to him. As they began to explore it, they recognized the telecom-energy connection is different in today's world compared to what it looked like near the turn of the century, when Enron was the player on that field.

"Before becoming an energy provider, we were at the mercy of our clients," Bornstein says. "We always had to chase our own tail. Now, we are a retail energy supplier serving load to over 20,000 customers. We



TOD CHAIRMAN JEFF BORNSTEIN

also work for 10 other energy companies selling their electricity and gas."

He continues, "TOD makes about 2,000 energy sales a day. As a fully registered, licensed utility, Great American Power buys its power on the open, spot and futures markets. Thus we are a service provider, management company and a vendor."

TOD also continues to keep its telecom interests. Along with what was mentioned above, it also functions as a LEC billing service provider, and TOD has become one of the largest social media security companies in the world. But success like this isn't unusual for Bornstein, who started the company as a one-man operation. It quickly became a large traditional master agent in the early days of "equal access," which were brought on by the Telecommunications Act of 1996.

Recalling those early days, Bornstein states, "For agents back then, getting paid was a real challenge." But loyalty to a good company has paid dividends. "A lot of the master agents we are targeting today started with us as sub-agents years ago," he says.

TOD and Equalnet, a Houston-based long distance

reseller, long out of business, put together the first performance-based telemarketing program in 1994, and developed the telemarketing model that is still used today. From there, TOD began to segue entirely into telemarketing.

For much of its history, everything revolved around telecom. However, TOD has evolved: not only with energy but also with political polling, lead generation and social media content moderation and image view.

"We have been doing political work for some time now," says Olds, explaining that it includes everything from calls to encourage people to vote to doing surveys for specific organizations or candidates.

"The company also is looking at several future possibilities, because the trio of principals knows the company needs to evolve constantly in a changing world. We are looking at expanding our content moderating." Olds continues. "It's high on the list, because we pioneered the work. We were actually monitoring 38 million images a day for companies like MySpace."

What separates TOD from other companies that offer content moderating services is that TOD does it in real time with real people.

"There are companies that offer a computer solution," Olds says. "But the computer isn't always able to catch what the human eye can."

The company also is looking for growth in the online classifieds space and virtual chat, as well as in health-care and pharmaceutical verticals.

"Call centers and call center management remain a major portion of TOD's overall business," Bonavita points out.

TOD was a pioneer in standardizing metrics for call centers and creating methodologies for managing them.

"Call centers have difficulty managing the human factor," says Bonavita, explaining that relationship building is important, and that requires the right kind of opportunities being packaged for potential clients. He says that within the company's call center space, "We don't look to just fill the seats; we have extensive training, professionally and behaviorally. We have a real, defined organization and structure around our operations."

As Bonavita relates, "TOD is successful in having its fingers in so many pies because, with Jeff and Justin, we don't try to grow too far and too fast. We explore how to make money and then we apply best practices.

"We also work with service providers to ensure that we are giving them quality," says Bonavita.

"That quality includes bringing all call center jobs back to the United States," adds Bornstein. "We have stepped away from off-shoring. We did that in 2000 for AT&T, but it's not really cost-effective or feasible to manage. We are very proud of America and of Americans, so we like to keep our work in this country."

Today TOD is the largest performance-based call center operation in the United States. □



TOD PRESIDENT & COO CHRIS BONAVITA



TOD CEO JUSTIN OLDS