

Thoi Bao Newspaper: 19 years of Serving the Vietnamese Community in Canada

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Thành quả, cơ hội, thử thách.

Vietnamese Canadian Community
Celebrating 30 Years in Canada:
Achievements, Opportunities, and Challenges

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How we got where we are today

- Thoi Bao newspaper: We are currently producing Thoi Bao weekly editions in Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Vancouver and the USA. In total, we print about 42,000 copies weekly for different cities in North America.
- Frequent Questions: How did you do it? How did you start? With the theme of this workshop: Achievements, Opportunities, and Challenges, I would like to take this opportunity to explain how we got where we are today, besides the fact that we were very lucky.

Consider the facts: started in 1986 with one tabloid newspaper, 24 pages, 2,000 copies monthly, with a two person team in a basement office.

After 19 years, we are now publishing:

- Toronto, Thursday edition, tabloid, 208 pages, 14,000 copies weekly.
- Toronto, Saturday edition, tabloid, 152 pages, 12,000 copies weekly.
- Montreal/Ottawa edition: magazine, 208 pages, 4,000 copies weekly
- Thoi Bao USA Edition, 148 pages, magazine, glossy cover, 3,000 copies weekly. Distributed in most of the states in the USA.
- Thoi Su Vancouver, tabloid, 176 pages, 6,000 copies weekly.
- Thoi Bao Chicago, Monthly, 3,000 copies fro the Chicago area.
- Thoi Bao South West Ontario, 3,000 copies, distributed in the South west cities of Ontario such as London, Kitchener, Waterloo, Guelph, and Windsor.
- Radio program in Montreal, broadcasted weekly under TNVN radio, 5 hours from 1 pm to 6pm.
- Radio program in Toronto, broadcasted weekly under TNVN radio, 3 hours from 7pm to 10 pm.
- A separate printing company which print most of our newspapers (except for the Vancouver edition). We have about 25 employees at this printing location, which currently provides printing to mainstream and other ethnic community newspapers.
- We own and operate 3 offices located in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver with 20 full time staff for the newspaper and radio operation in these cities.

Keys to success!

- The success of Thoi Bao can be summarized in a few key words:
 - Brand Name Creation,
 - Good People,
 - Focus on Customers,
 - Printing circulation,
 - Community Services.

BRAND NAME CREATION

- From day one, our objective was to create a brand name that will last. We wanted to have a newspaper that is truly a newspaper with no affiliation with any political parties, any groups. The objective was to maintain an unbiased view so that the news can be reported as accurate as possible in order to gain the trust from the readers and the community.
- Our management's focus has been: how to be the best newspaper with rich content even though it is a free newspaper.
- With that in mind our focus is clear and we do not want to be sidetracked by any other activities. We do not join any political groups, nor do we do any other business, which may compete with our advertisers. We stick to the media which is mainly newspaper and radio. The printing business is just a business extension with the objective of providing better printing for our own newspaper.
- We stick with our focus: to be the best, the most recognized name in the Vietnamese community in North America. We will continue to do so as long as we are in business.

Brand Name Creation: messages for our younger business persons in the audience

- Do you stick to your goals and maintain your focus?
- Do you work enough to create and promote your own brand name whether it's your own business or your career?
- Do you work on your production system with the objective of delivering the same products with consistency in quality.
- Brand Name Creation is the most important aspect of a business. Everything you do must aim to create a brand name for your business, so that you can distinguish yourself from other competitors.

Good People

- From day one, we were lucky to have a good core of people. When we got good people with strong self motivation, a lot of good things happened.
- Having good people in your team is not good enough, you need to provide them with opportunity and capability so that they can help you in achieving your goals.
- The success of Thoi Bao cannot be attributed to the work of just one person, it is the work of the team with the same clear focus and direction.

Good People: to find people with skills better than your own

- So the objectives are to find good people, to provide them with financial and technical resources and let them do their jobs. At Thoi Bao, we provide the most up to date computer technology to our group. We continue to reinvest in the computer technology such as new computers, software, network etc. so that our staff can work more efficiently.
- In some cases, for the owner/publisher: Buying new computers is a sin. They asked: “Why do I have to buy or upgrade new computers every few years?”
- What they did not see is that their staff’s capability is limited with outdated equipment.

I rather do it myself!

- Other common complaint is: “We can not find good people. It takes too much time to train new staff so I rather do it myself”. With that mentality, it is very hard to grow. We can not grow without proper staff.
- In our company, we view our staff as the key asset. The people, the dedicated staffs, are the key for Thoi Bao success.
- Questions that we need to ask ourselves: Do we have time to look for new talent? Do we spend enough time in the training, mentoring younger staff? Do we provide them with enough guidance and support to help us grow in our business?

Focus on Customers:

- For some business the customer issue is very clear. The customer is the one that use your products or pay for your service.
- In the newspaper business, especially the free newspaper business, it is slightly different. We have two set of customers. - One group is the advertisers who pay for your operation. - The second is the readers who pick up your free paper weekly.
- Who is more important? Whom should we focus our service? The answer is we need to focus on both groups. They are both equally important in our business. Without the advertisers we can not pay our bills. But without our readership, we will not have the advertisements.

Sales and Editorial

- At Thoi Bao, we have two equal important groups to serve our customers: the sales/administration and the editorial groups.
- The sales/administration looks after the advertisers and our focus is to serve the advertising clients. We provide advertising services including meeting with our customers, preparing the ads, etc...
- The editorial group: we have a very strong focus on better content and quality of the articles. I do not think we have the best content yet but we continue to search for better writers, better stories so that we can have the best possible content.

which is more important?

- Our answer is quite clear: Readership is more important than the advertisers. The readers are the ultimate customers. Without readership, we will not have the advertisers. The ultimate customers are our readers.
- So here are some questions we always ask ourselves:
 - Do we identify who are our customers, which group is more important?
 - Who is your ultimate customer and do you focus your services on them?

Printing circulation: the required Integrity

- This parameter may apply only to the free newspaper business. Since it is free paper why print more than what you need. We need high circulation to serve the community but high circulation means more cost. In the newspaper business the printing cost is about 75% of the operating cost.
- The average printing cost of a Thoi Bao newspaper in Toronto is about 1\$ per copy. Since it is a free paper, the temptation is there to reduce the circulation to lower cost. Since we print 26,000 copies weekly in Toronto, a reduction of 5,000 copies per week means \$5,000 profit per week.

Reduce the circulation to cut down the printing cost?

- A lot of publishers may reduce the circulation to cut down the printing cost. However, what they only accomplish is a short term gain and a long term lost. They lose the market share to competitors and eventually the advertising revenue.
- At Thoi Bao, we maintain our printing circulation at the same level every week. Our aim is to increase the circulation if we can afford it. By keeping high circulation and maintaining it, we make less profit but we have a high level of readership. As a result, we are recognized as the top newspaper in popular Canadian cities such as Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal.

Short term gain at the expense of long term benefits

- By maintaining our high circulation, we have prevented others from entering the market since the readers are well served by the Thoi Bao newspaper.
- At Thoi Bao, we remind ourselves everyday:
 - Do not try to look at a short term gain at the expense of long term benefits.
 - Whatever we do, we have to think of the long term benefit for the business.

Community services

- Once Thoi Bao starts to gain recognition, we look around to see what we can do to give back to the community.
- That is how Thoi Bao Community Fund was formed. It is a non-profit organization with the aim to raise fund for charity activities for the Vietnamese community in Viet Nam and in Canada.
- We organized musical shows, concerts to raise funds for charity organizations such as The Scholarship Funds of the Vietnamese Association in Toronto, Orbis Canada, Foster Parents, Canada Red Cross, The Hospital for Sick Kids in Toronto etc...

Thoi Bao Community Fund

- From the first musical show in 2000 until today, TBCF has raised and provided a total of almost \$109,000 to various charity organizations in Canada and in VN, etc..
- All these activities provide an avenue for Thoi Bao staff to volunteer their time. We put in free advertising for the concerts and a lot of volunteer hours for our staff. The gain from public relations is excellent and Thoi Bao has established a positive connection with the community.
- Our focus at Thoi Bao Community Fund: try to give back to the community that we serve.

Summary

- I have shared with you the five key elements for the free newspaper business in North America, based on my personal experience of 19 years in the business.
- They are:
 - creating a brand name,
 - hiring good people,
 - identifying and serving your customers,
 - maintaining a high level of printing circulation,
 - promoting community work.

Last Words

- You may wonder why I did not mention anything about the competition, etc. Competition is important too, but the five parameters mentioned are more vital in the free newspaper business. If you can take care of these five key parameters, you will be fine in your business.
- Thank you for your attention and I hope that you have a wonderful workshop during the next two days.