

Case Study: Xiotech

Background

Around 2008, Xiotech (headquartered in Eden Prairie, Minnesota) was a relatively small but growing and high-potential player in the ultra-competitive enterprise data storage industry. Its storage hardware products featured self-healing technology, which was really cutting-edge and high-demand at the time. After a rebrand and some ownership changes, the company was sold to VIOLIN Systems in 2020.



Situation

At that time, the company was owned by a venture capital firm with tens of millions of dollars invested into it. As a result, the Board and executive team had ambitious goals to realize the potential of self-healing storage and significantly increase market share against established market leaders (EMC, Dell, NetApp, etc.) and other smaller but still tough competitors. With success in those two areas, they could eventually take the company public – and use the funds raised through an IPO to transform the company into the next established storage leader.

Marketing was a central driver of the company's growth strategy. Robust product, alliance and technical marketing teams were established, with significant success. Strategic communications had been outsourced to a Twin Cities-based public relations firm, whose activities largely consisted of media relations.

The company decided it needed to further build a corporate communications function to drive visibility and sales leads for its product suite, lead the way strategically on corporate messaging and branding and more efficiently help the company grow.

The Game Changer

Xiotech hired Jason Sprenger in 2008 to lead its corporate PR and communications. Over his tenure, he directed all corporate (internal and external) communications, especially:

- Media relations aimed at B2B/vertical outlets, leading business organizations, etc.
- Analyst relations to large and small players in the storage world. A series of paid and non-paid relationships were established with Gartner, IDC, Forrester and a few influential, smaller analysts. Briefings were held monthly and quarterly, in-person meetings took place at all major industry trade shows and additional ad-hoc correspondence followed as well.
- Leveraging the company's presence at major trade shows and conferences to maximize relationship development, awareness and lead generation
- Crisis communications, when such situations arose



Game Changer Communications

- Internal communications, all-staff town hall meetings and more to help a growing team gel and optimize morale
- Counseling executives on major decisions, media training them, etc.

Results

Quickly, Sprenger and his team had a tremendous impact.

- After establishing baseline metrics for media visibility, the team increased those metrics by 4x in the subsequent six-month period
- The analyst relations program produced tremendous success: direct sales leads, several third-party report and profile mentions, strong relationships and more. Combined, they definitely provided a spark that propelled the company forward.
- He hired a new PR firm, drove more impact and saved the company more than \$150,000 on agency fees alone in his first year
- He and the team built and launched a robust social media platform, including a blog. The team grew communities, shared content and engaged with people daily
- He quickly became Xiotech's primary corporate contact to all media, as well as industry and financial analysts

With Sprenger on board, Xiotech significantly accelerated its overall marketing efforts and took several steps toward the ultimate goal of going public – to the point the company started to have those discussions at the executive level near the end of his tenure. While that wasn't ultimately in the cards, it became the first of many significant corporate acceleration programs Sprenger led in his career.

In Their Words

"I had the pleasure of being a part of the PR agency team while Jason Sprenger was at Xiotech. Jason is truly one of the most personable, creative people I have ever worked with. He managed to create a unified team, working environment and was an expert in all things Xiotech. His passion for PR and technology came across very clearly through his work."

Jason is really good at what he does, but he's also just a genuine guy and an easy person to be around. All PR agencies should be so lucky to have a guy like Jason as their contact."

--Meghan Brundage, then of CHEN PR