

# Apco Worldwide

This global PR and consulting firm is helping clients succeed in an increasingly intricate and interconnected world. Margery Kraus tells us how.



The global economy of the 21st century has made the world smaller, but it certainly isn't any less complex. Apco Worldwide is a consulting firm that provides forward-thinking services to help clients navigate this challenging environment. The company built its name and reputation because of its internal investments in innovation.

Apco Worldwide works to meet client needs in the realm of communication and public affairs consulting by blending a global perspective with local expertise. The company has been in business since Margery Kraus, president and CEO, founded it in 1984. It began as an affiliate of the Arnold & Porter international law firm.

The company eventually spun off and became part of the Grey Advertising organization in 1991, but in 2004, a management buyout made it a majority employee-owned company. Since the buyout, the company has doubled in size and become certified as a women-owned business by the Women Presidents' Educational Organization, the regional partner of the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC).

## Clients come first

The company has more than 500 employees representing around 40 nationalities. With 29 offices around the world, the company aims to provide clients with a highly integrated offer on a global basis. Its representatives are former elected leaders, journalists, ambassadors, business and nonprofit executives, government officials, market researchers, and communication and Internet experts. The company works to be a partner of choice, pushing the boundaries of communication culture by culture.

"Our clients are focused on their businesses or launching new products or programs, but they also need to understand how to operate when expanding to new markets," said Kraus. "Our capabilities illustrate to our clients just how important public relations is to their business objectives, and they see us as a preferred partner because of our ability to help them embrace the future and find the opportunities that lie ahead."

Capable of working in virtually any industry or sector, the company helps clients traverse the multifaceted environments

of business, industry, and finance; media, public opinion, and society; and government and public policy. About 50% of its work is coordinated between five or more offices, and 50% of its work is dealing with crises.

“Our clients often deal with litigation, tax issues, or governmental threats to their interests, and they come to us for help,” said Kraus. “What we end up doing is winning their trust and confidence by taking on an assignment like that and building a long-term strategic relationship from there.”

Whether solving a crisis, helping clients with market positioning, or monitoring sector movements, the company can sit down with clients to help them map out their needs, budget resources, and priorities. The company then organizes a team to support the developed roadmap, appointing a client relationship manager to take charge of the account and serve as the client’s advocate to make sure they get access to the right resources and senior strategists. Accounts are constantly reviewed and updated.

### Taking steps for growth

The company is able to work across many market segments because of its broad expertise, but there are several highly active industries where it is placing particular emphasis. Healthcare, food and consumer goods, and renewable energy are all areas where Kraus sees plenty of opportunity ahead because they are in growth mode and have special needs.

Kraus said the company is also continuing to invest in its online practice. It was an early adopter of online techniques and strategies in the mid-1990s, and almost every project now has a digital component. Research is another area of focus, as Apco Insight, the company’s opinion research division, specializes in collecting high-quality opinion research data on corporate reputation and important public policy issues. The team has conducted research projects in 88 countries.

Other investments have focused on geography. Kraus is well aware of the global markets trending to the East, and the company is wielding a double-edged sword by investing in its

offices in countries like India and China because not only can they help Eastern companies become global players, they can help Western countries gain access to local stakeholders.

Another major initiative is the company’s launch of an executive service it calls GPS (Global Political Strategies). It is designed to give CEOs the internal advice and strategic counsel they need to better inform board-level discussions, shape business planning, help them properly understand new market opportunities, and address immediate and longer-term business and reputational challenges. Carlos Gutierrez, the former CEO of Kellogg and former US secretary of commerce, leads the 22-member group.

“We haven’t made a big deal about the group yet because it is just getting off the ground, but it should be exciting for companies and CEOs that are looking at market entry,” Kraus said. “They will be naturally curious about things like political and market stability, and GPS can give them added information outside of their internal capabilities.”

Kraus was quick to point out that the staff making up the middle and junior levels of the company have tremendous talent and energy. Combined with the senior advisers, these rising stars can bridge the gap, implement programs, and provide exceptional service to clients.

Growth is always a challenge for the company because the consulting business is, in a sense, pay as you go. Apco has to be cautious not to get too far ahead of revenue and put itself at risk, but it can’t be overly conservative, either. Finding the right balance is a perennial undertaking. In addition, Kraus is focused on building a legacy so the organization she founded more than 25 years ago will continue well into the future.

“There are three things that make a business like this work: happy clients, a fulfilled staff, and a profitable company,” she said. “Passion is our secret ingredient to being a market leader, and that passion will take the company forward.” ■

—Eric Slack



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