

Restaurant Confidential

The insider's guide to restaurant promotion, marketing and more
presented by

RestReview.com



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Temple Downtown brings a new level of dining to Providence
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Tom Kelly and Rick Wolf on how to keep customers coming back

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Supplier's list, this month: PR Agencies
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Welcome

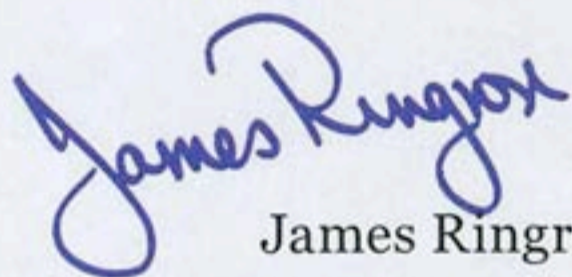
Welcome to the inaugural issue of Restaurant Confidential Magazine. We are excited to bring you this hospitality industry magazine and look forward to it evolving into a valuable resource, reference and of course, an entertaining publication for you over the coming months.

At Restaurant Confidential our agenda is marketing, promotion and operations for and of the hospitality industry. We will cover a broad range of subjects and welcome your feedback and suggestions. Check out the website that complements the magazine:

www.RestaurantConfidentialMagazine.com

We'll carry job listings, list of advertisers and also make our back issues available to you in electronic format.

Once again, thanks for reading this and enjoy!



James Ringrose
Publisher

How to reach us

Website:

RestaurantConfidentialMagazine.com

Address:

90 York Road, Mansfield, MA 02048

Phone: 508.337.8520

Email: magazine@restreview.com

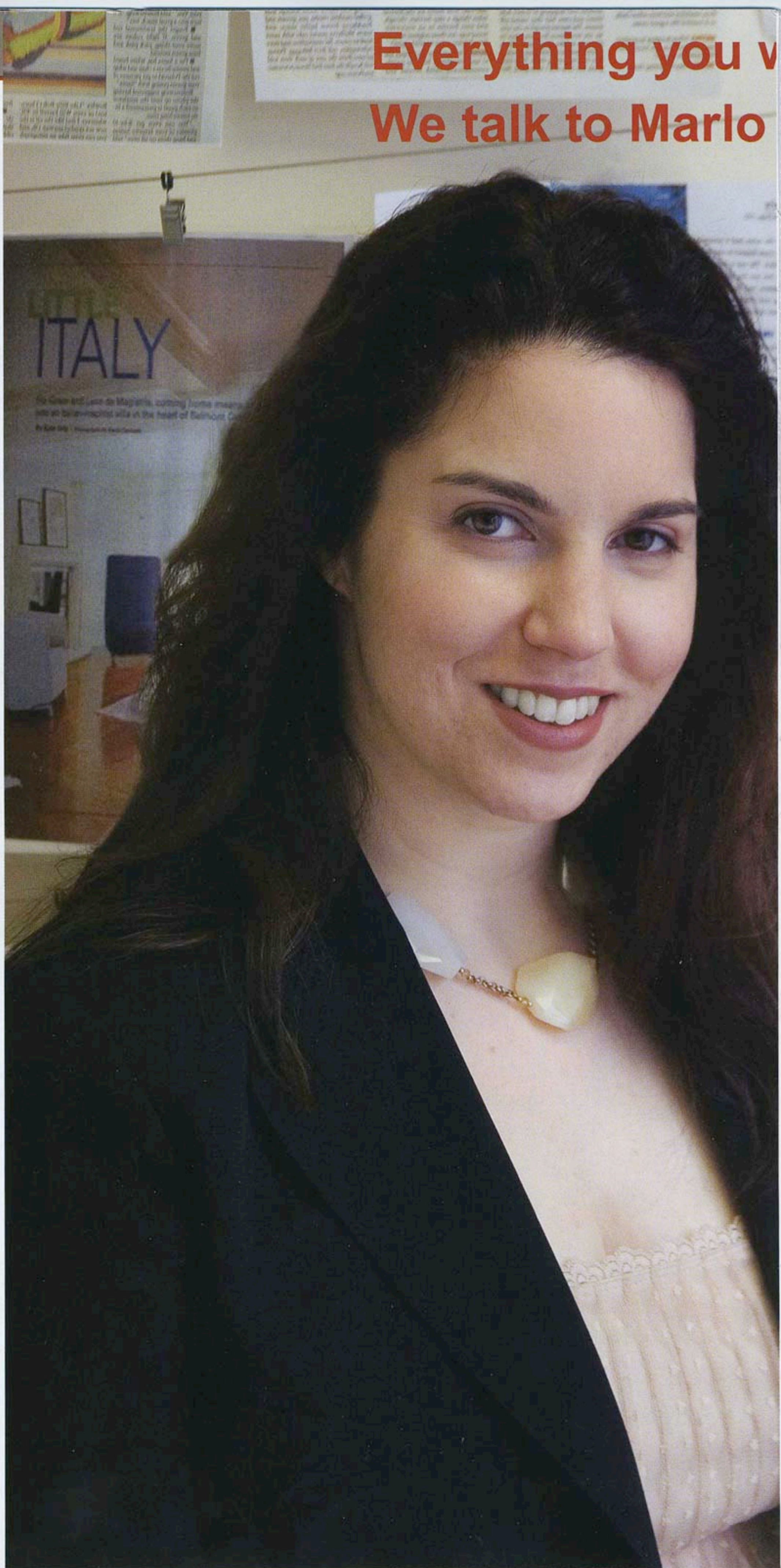
Fax: 508.337.8521

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Everything you v We talk to Marlo



wanted to know about PR but were afraid to ask. Fogelman of marlo marketing/communications.

by James Ringrose

We regularly hear from restaurant owners that they are somewhat perplexed by PR and how to most effectively benefit from using it. Interviewing a PR professional about the ins-and-outs of their buzzword dominated industry inevitably raises the question of who “spins” who. So we needed to find someone we could trust to be straight with us.

During the course of the last three years, we have encountered Marlo Fogelman - the founder of marlo

marketing/communications - and her clients many times. Her professional and open attitude is very refreshing and after a brief negotiation about checking the spin doctor at the door, she graciously agreed to “tell all” about PR and the way PR can work for you.

Q *Hi Marlo, why should any business consider spending money on PR?*

There are two main components that make up marketing, advertising and PR. But, for any business, unless your marketing budget is in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, there is no way you can get the same bang for your buck as you can with a strategic public relations campaign. For restaurants with tight budgets and low margins, this principle is only further exemplified.

Q *How does PR fit into the overall marketing mix?*

Most people don't really understand exactly what

PR means, so let's start with some definitions. Simply stated, marketing is everything you do to create awareness of your product or service amongst potential customers. Advertising and public relations fall below in two buckets. The old adage “advertising is paying, and public relations is praying” sums up the difference. As that saying

“My job is about positioning my client in the way in which they wish to be viewed...”

demonstrates, most people equate “public relations” with “media relations” but, in reality, media relations is simply one subset of public relations.

Public relations really is anything that affects how people perceive your restaurant, which can span the spectrum from the way in which your hostess answers the phone to your brand representation through your website to coverage in the local paper. While editorial coverage is extremely important, you can have the best media coverage in the world but treat your customers poorly and you're not going to be in business very long. So, to answer the question of how it fits into the overall marketing mix, media relations fits prominently, but public relations is your key ingredient.

Q *Many of The Restaurant Review customers use PR in short bursts and then try other marketing approaches - does this work?*

Again, you're talking about media relations. Yes, you can mix it up by focusing media efforts around seasonal pitches or one-off

promotions, together with direct mail, advertising campaigns or other marketing tools. But while it makes sense from a theoretical standpoint, for long-term positioning it isn't as effective. Media relations is all about knowing what's coming down the pike for coverage and seeking out opportunities that are appropriate for your restaurant. If you're not

working with a publicist on a regular basis, the likelihood of long-term brand development is greatly decreased.

Q *How can you tell if PR is working; what are some of the metrics?*

That is one of the biggest challenges of public relations, because so much of our work product is intangible. I can never promise a client certain coverage, or a good review. My job is about positioning my client in the way in which they wish to be viewed, and creating awareness of them to members of the media. While I can plant the seed and work to nurture the story as best I can, I can't control the ultimate outcome and that is something that clients need to understand.

As for metrics, if a review comes out and reservations pick up, that's a pretty good indicator. If a certain dish is featured in a story and suddenly sales of that dish expand exponentially, again, a good sign. Other times, it is more anecdotal. For example, customers telling you that they saw your restaurant in the paper. But the point of public relations is to maintain your brand's positioning in the appropriate marketplace over the



long term, so that someone may read about your restaurant in a magazine, then see your chef at a charity event, and then on Friday night when making plans with friends for dinner, it's your restaurant that is top of mind and where the reservation is made. This kind of long-term awareness is incredibly hard to put a metric to, although restaurants can try to collect this kind of data with a comment card in the check presenter.

Q What do you get for your dollar? Is it possible to spend a very small amount and still have some impact?

As in any business, there are different levels of PR practitioners. Someone who works out of their home will be less expensive than a mid-size agency, which will be less expensive than a large agency. Another option is to hire someone in-house, although there are challenges with that as well.

Q If money is tight, then PR is sometimes the only marketing spend a restaurant makes - what do you think about this approach?

This is hands-down the best approach. As I said, PR in the form of media relations, event involvement and other awareness-generating opportunities is, for most restaurants, the most cost-effective and impactful way to spend one's marketing dollars.

Q What's a retainer and why would a restaurant want to pay one - after all you don't "retain" a table in a restaurant?

Just like anything one associates themselves with, your PR person is an extension of your brand - your face outside of the restaurant's four walls - and should be considered a strong part of your internal team. Smart restaurateurs want you in their restaurant at least once a week, getting to know the staff, trying the food and cocktails and being inspired for possible story ideas. PR people are always getting leads and hearing about opportunities...if there're not on retainer, no one is constantly thinking about you in that realm to help your business.

Q What's the best way to find a PR professional?

Look in your industry. As a restaurant, take note of which restaurants in town seem to often be in the paper or involved with events. Sometimes the PR contact is on the restaurant's website's contact page, or call the restaurant and ask who does their PR. Another good way is to reach out to the local media and see who they recommend. Whoever you hire will be representing your brand, so it is a good idea to know how they are viewed by the people they work with on a daily basis.

Q How would you set expectations for a new client?

Setting expectations is one of the most important—if not the most important—steps that must be taken. In fact, we feel it is so important that at my agency we created something that we call the marlo method, which is basically all about defining expectations in order to ensure success.

The most common complaint

prospective clients have after meeting with public relations firms is that they have no clear concept of what tangible services are being provided for their retainer. As we talked about earlier, public relations is, by its very nature, a somewhat intangible service. That said, there are ways to demonstrate deliverables and an understanding of the need for a ROI. While some clients do seek PR services simply for ego, most clients are rightly concerned with how this commitment is going to increase their bottom line. So we developed the marlo method as our proprietary way of discussing new business relationships in more concrete terms.

Following an initial "getting to know you" meeting to learn about a client's restaurant and their vision for growth, we create a customized strategic marketing plan complete with a 12 month calendar, outlining suggested activities. While opportunities may arise and needs change, at the very least it provides a touch point for expectations and deliverables.

Q If you could only give one piece of advice to a potential client, what would it be?

Know what you are getting into, and commit yourself to it - both from a financial and a time perspective - for at least one year. PR is a process, and to think that it will happen overnight is a mistake. Also, be realistic in your expectations. Not every chef is going to be Wolfgang Puck and not every restaurateur is going to be Danny Meyer. But if you have a vision, your product supports that and you're willing to commit to a long-term program, PR can help your restaurant like no other marketing tool can.

Q Is there a professional body that licenses or controls PR professionals?

Interview continued...

No, there is no license required to practice PR. The Public Relations Society of America (prsa.org) offers something called APR, Accreditation in Public Relations, but it is not a widely-known or coveted attribute for a PR professional. I am, however, an attorney licensed in NY and MA, so I consider myself bound to a higher level of ethics!

Q *What is the best thing about your line of work?*

The best thing about the way in which my company practices PR is that we truly care for each of our clients. We feel that we have a vested interest in their success or failure, and that we have an opportunity to help them achieve their dreams. And, of course, with our restaurant and other food product clients, the free meals and other treats certainly don't suck!

Q *Tell me a bit about marlo marketing/communications and why you are a bit different from the average agency?*

From my past experiences, as well as stories I've heard from clients and friends who have worked with other agencies, we're different for one simple reason: we care. I know that any agency will say that they do, but my experience tells me that most look at each client as a retainer, period. In my first PR job, the owner of the agency used to praise me for "marrying" my clients. I wasn't really sure what it meant at the time, but now I pride myself on having that style of client interaction be a part of my intuitive nature. I mentor my employees to develop the same style.

Essentially, what this means is that we see our client relationships as true partnerships, and we look to work with people who understand the benefit of that. We also work from a place of respect for the media. We never lie to them or spin a story too far to get a piece, because we value a

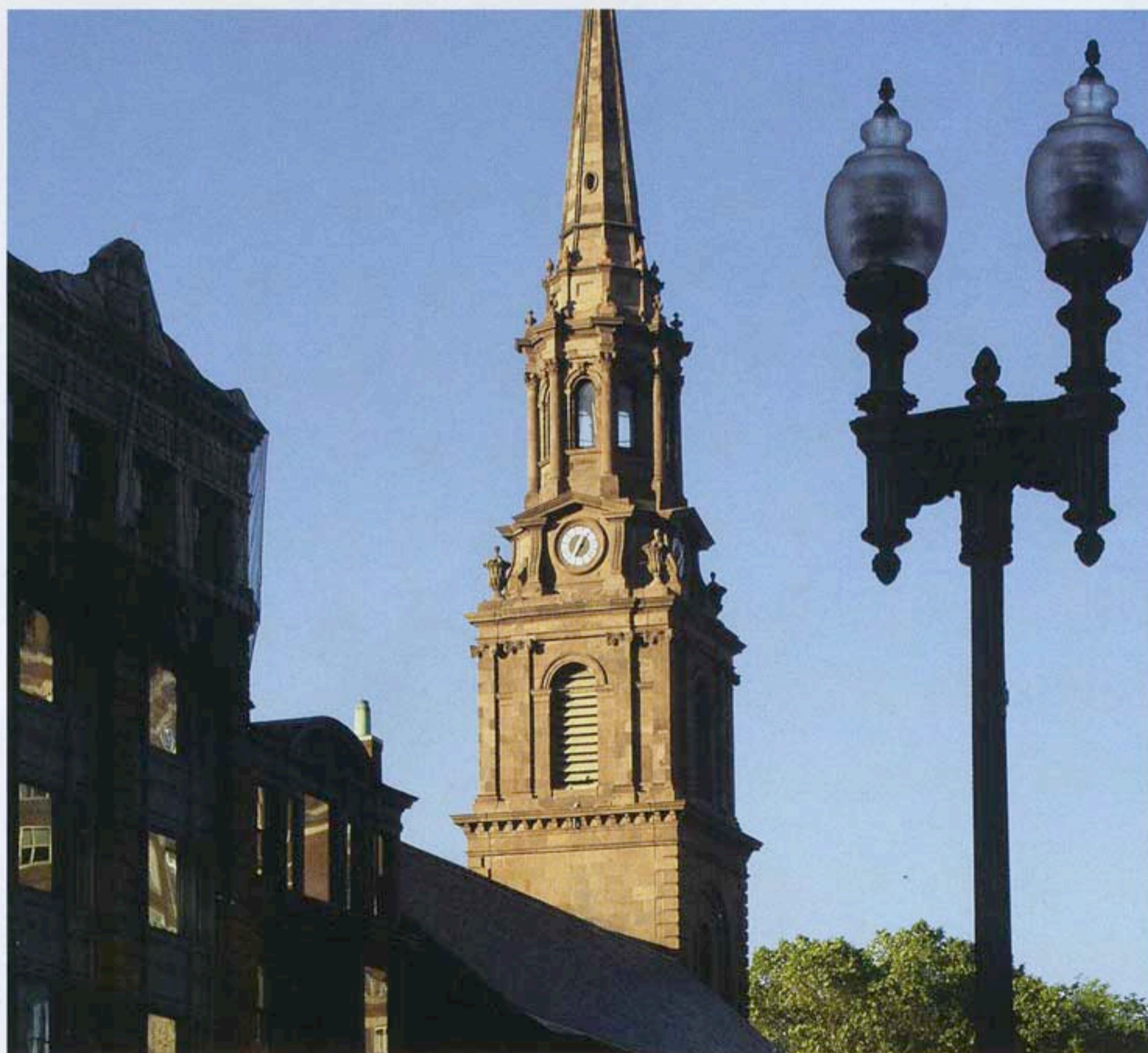
About: marlo marketing/communications

marlo marketing/communications is a full-service boutique marketing and communications agency that specializes in designing and executing strategic public relations campaigns for best-of-class consumer lifestyle products and services. To learn more, please visit www.marlomc.com or call 617.375.9700

long-term relationship over a short term gain, and the media know this and work with us because of that. We have our client's best interests at heart, and don't encourage them to take advantage of an opportunity just to give the appearance of account activity. Also, we work very hard to maintain a diverse and best-of-class client base, which gives us many opportunities for cross-promotion between clients. In a nutshell, we are passionate about what we do and, as a result, we are very good at securing

targeted placements and creating awareness among a broad range of audiences for our clients.

As we thanked Marlo and headed back to the office to prepare this article. I mused to myself - "how would I know if I had been spun anyway?" If you read this far you will probably agree that for what it's worth Marlo describes a pretty powerful marketing tool. In later articles we will look at both case studies and client's views to round out the picture.



The view outside Marlo's office on Boylston Street