

■ BLF MARKETING

When Jeff Bibb and Frank Lott joined forces in January of 1978, they could only dream that the business they founded with just \$300 in their checking account would blossom into the success story BLF Marketing is today.

"It was a two-year experiment that panned out well for us," says Bibb of the 26-year-old company that now boasts 40 clients spread throughout Tennessee, Kentucky, Alabama, Georgia, and Florida. "Frank and I felt there was a place for a marketing and advertising firm in this area of Tennessee and southern Kentucky, and we were confident we could carve out a niche."

The niche they established was the result of a vision the two men shared from the beginning. Bibb and Lott (then 23 and 26 years old), realized that specialization, rather than diversification, would set them apart from other companies. In addition, Bibb, the former director of publication services at Austin Peay, and Lott, the former director of creative services at Jostens, focused their attention not just on growing their own business but on providing their clients with strategic marketing and creative services that would help their businesses grow and thrive.



Jeff Bibb

Frank Lott

Joel Fryer

David Hoke

Calling themselves "Tractive Effort Communications," they set up shop in a rent-free room at Tenpenny Printing Company on Washington Court. And from their first consistent account – Conroy, Marable & Holleman Real Estate – Bibb and Lott brought an equal measure of business acumen and creativity to their efforts.

Later, in 1978, the growing company moved to a larger location in Cumberland Heights, where it remained for the next three years. Its reputation spread quickly and its client roster grew by establishing long-term relationships with local companies such as Acme Boot, The Trane Company, First Trust & Savings Bank, First National Bank, and Jack B. Turner & Associates.

"Our commitment has always been to put our clients' business and marketing interests first," Lott explains. "We're as involved in the strategic side – goal setting, budgeting, media coordination, results analysis – as we are in creative development."

In 1981, the team purchased an office complex on North First and Jefferson streets, today known as Jefferson Square. The move brought them into the heart of Clarksville and cemented their desire to help their city achieve the same success as their clients. The firm changed its name to Bibb & Lott Advertising in 1984.

With the 1986 addition of partner Joel Fryer, the former director of public relations at LSU-Shreveport, the company's capabilities expanded – while its focus continued to narrow. It became Bibb, Lott & Fryer Marketing/Advertising in 1991. The firm plied its experiences in two key areas – banking and healthcare – to expand its client base. A turning point occurred in 1988, when Bibb joined with eight other local businessmen and founded Heritage Bank. The experience of crafting a progressive marketing program for a high-performing community bank provided opportunities for Bibb, Lott & Fryer to attract more banks over a wider area.

Another highlight for BLF was the May 2002 rebranding of Farmers & Merchants Bank as F&M Bank. Over a three-day weekend, all 11 offices underwent an amazing image transformation,

an event that took 12 months to plan and orchestrate – and included every marketing item from signs to business cards to website.

Healthcare – including regional hospitals, physician groups, and healthcare organizations – is another area of expertise for the company. The firm has consistently won top marketing awards in state and national competitions, the lion's share through its 15-year association with Murray-Calloway County (Kentucky) Hospital.

Community and regional economic development groups have also profited from the firm's expertise. Here at home, the BLF Marketing team worked closely with the Clarksville-Montgomery County Economic Development Council to launch the monumentally successful Aspire marketing program in 1996. The ubiquitous "rivers and spires" logo and "Gateway to the New South" positioning theme were developed by BLF as marketing foundations for the Aspire program.

While the BLF team downplays its many contributions to the community, it is impossible to ignore the stamp the partners have put on Clarksville. The following are examples of major community leadership roles:

- Clarksville River District Commission – From its beginning in 1987 through 1998, Bibb chaired the commission, that developed and implemented a visionary 20-year master plan. In 1998, he was recognized with the prestigious Clearwater Award from the international Waterfront Center.
- Clarksville Coyotes Professional Baseball – The three partners led a group of investors to form a first-class operation and leave behind two memorable summers of baseball in 1996-97.
- Customs House Museum – Heavily involved in the museum since its inception, Lott was a two-term board chair and was instrumental in the museum's \$3.5 million expansion in 1996. An accomplished watercolor artist, Lott has contributed works that have brought record amounts at annual Flying High fundraiser auctions.
- Post-Tornado – The BLF principals have been heavily vested in the rebuilding of Downtown Clarksville. Bibb was co-chair of the city's "Tornado Task Force," which set clear direction for redevelopment of the downtown and led to the formation of the Downtown District Partnership. Lott and Fryer spent countless hours in the rebuilding of their respective churches, Trinity Episcopal and Madison Street United Methodist.

In time, the energy of rebuilding Downtown Clarksville was channeled into expanding their business. The firm took its boldest step yet in May 2002 with the opening of a Nashville office in MetroCenter, headed by a fourth partner, banking and real estate specialist, David Hoke. Now called BLF Marketing, the firm's Nashville office became a springboard for additional growth, with BLF employing 20 people by 2004.

"Blending our civic interests with our professional skills has been a very satisfying part of our existence here," Fryer says. From their far-reaching reputation as strategic marketing experts to their intense local civic interests, the partners of BLF Marketing have indeed carved a niche for their company – and at the same time, made Clarksville a much more special place.



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