



Managing Partners Paul Borchert and Jeff McDonald.

True, Honest, Focused

The Canopy Group insurance agency, based in Le Sueur, is making waves by rapidly growing its business.

The Canopy group was named the 2018 Agency of the Year by the Minnesota Independent Insurance Agents & Brokers Association, and for good reason. In recent years, The Canopy Group has quadrupled in size. Six years ago they had two carriers with a million dollars of premium per year. Today, they have over a million dollars of premium

per year with more than 10 carriers. The Canopy Group has been selling insurance out of Le Sueur, Minnesota since 1930. They also have offices in Belle Plaine and Minnetonka. Managing Partners Paul Borchert and Jeff McDonald joined the group in 1991 and 1996, respectively. Both Borchert and McDonald graduated from Mankato East High School and from Minnesota State University in Mankato, and maintain strong ties to Southern Minnesota. “These small towns foster some really good people, and some really good development. Almost all of our employees are non-metro. It is pretty easy to be a big fish in a small pond, but it’s hard to make that pond expand. The only way you can do that is with a truly consumer-driven process and product that kind of catches fire. And that is what we did.” The explosion of growth was no accident. Borchert explains that in 2012, they decided to “rev it up a bit.” They called a meeting on a Tuesday morning,

and proposed an idea, “Every year, we’re going to shop our clients’ insurance for them. Everyone thought it was a crazy idea, but I asked, why? This sounds like a really good idea to me. It’s what the consumer wants, but 80% of the marketplace can’t do it because they only represent one carrier. The other 20% won’t because they don’t want to.” “The focus shifted from what was easier for us to what was easier for the client. Shopping our clients is a lot of work, but that’s what you hire us for.” To make the plan work, McDonald explains that two things had to happen: “We had to create the processes and then the marketing to bring in new customers. If we can’t do that, this doesn’t work.” The Canopy Group developed a process that works by segmenting each independent stage so employees become really good at what they do. “We have a team dedicated to marketing, another team dedicated to processing new business, a team focused on daily

customer service and another team that is focused on renewing business so that we remarket it to make sure you should stay where you are. We recently added another team just for people who didn’t come to us the first time. We still keep our promise by remarketing them a year after they decided not to go with us.” Borchert adds, “There is not another agency in the state that does what we are doing.” Cara McCann was brought on board as Marketing Communications Manager in 2013. “We knew we had to educate people on why we were different. Not a lot of people had heard of The Canopy Group. We led with WCCO because they had a good reputation, and they had such a broad reach. We’re all Southern Minnesota folk, we all know farmers who are in their tractors day and night listening to WCCO weather reports, market reports, and so forth. We felt we’d be in good hands. They introduced us to some digital products and marketing that were new to us.” McCann’s marketing initiatives have paid off. Borchert explains, “That was a gigantic leap of faith and a lot of money. They stayed on the message, and it just exploded.” “Our reps don’t cold call, 100% of the leads call us, and then we walk them through our process. Our employment has grown from 12 or 13 people to 33 or 34 employees. We’ll have 300 people call us this month for insurance. There’s a huge need, and we can be an advocate. I let our agents be really good at being insurance agents, and we take over the business part of it.” “By marketing our message and educating the client, it gives the client the ability to learn more about us and get in touch with us when they’re ready. Now when we’re having a conversation, we can have a true conversation,” adds McDonald. McDonald has successfully duplicated these processes and marketing strategies on the commercial and benefits side of the business, but with a twist. “The little bit of a twist is that many of my clients, or prospective clients think that every insurance carrier wants to provide them an insurance quote.” McDonald explains that this isn’t usually the case, “Insurance companies don’t

necessarily want to provide you a quote on the commercial side of it because it’s a different animal. Businesses do different things, they are not as homogeneous as your home. Your home is the same as my home. They might look different, but the risks are really the same.” “Business is a lot different. We take our business clients and help them identify the difference between insurable risk and business risk. My job is really to make you look sexy to the insurance company. It takes a lot of time to walk through that with a business owner, but it’s worth it.” Borchert adds, “Business works when the customer wins.” The Canopy Group is committed to researching the best options for their clients. “We also shop the marketplace for the companies that we are willing to represent. If a company isn’t hitting in our system, then they’re just not competitive. We have access to more than 50 carriers, but we probably use 16 of them regularly. It’s easy for us to vet them. We just throw them into our comparative rater. We’re running 600-700 per month. If they’re competitive, we take them aboard. We are an advocate for our client base. If it’s not good for you, it’s not good for us.” “We work with a lot of regional carriers who are really great, but not always very well known. Our line-up is based on the carriers who are best for our territory; for the zip codes we represent. We actually share that data with the carriers to try to make them a little more competitive in the zip codes we’re running in.” “Nobody has ever heard us say in a sales meeting, ‘OK, we should write more business with a certain company. The agent should do exactly what’s right for the customer. If you’re a client of The Canopy Group you might be driving home some night and we’ll call you and say, ‘I think we can move you to another carrier, pick up a couple coverages, and more importantly, save you \$700 bucks.’” McDonald contends, “The reason it’s working is because we are doing exactly what we told you we would do. Our deliverable is true, honest, and totally focused on the client. When you do exactly what you say you’re going to do, people trust that. When you do it repeti-



The Canopy Group's 2018 Agency of the Year Award.

tively over time, they become part of our incredible retention.” “Just do what you say you’re going to do, and be honest,” Borchert adds. “Before we put any marketing out there, we ask ourselves, Is this true? Is this something we can deliver on? If it isn’t, we can’t throw it out there.” “We have an average savings of over \$600 per client when they come to us. That’s a real number; we’ve researched it.”

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