

TARKENTON CASE STUDY

# BUSINESS CONSULTATION SERVICE

Unlimited online business consultation for small business owners



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## summary.

For more than 20 years, Tarkenton has offered unlimited online business consultation to small business owners through a variety of enterprise partners. This white label service has a proven track record of improving end user engagement and retention, while also providing advance insights into trends and needs in the SMB market that enable Tarkenton to innovate more effectively and serve as a partner to our enterprise clients.

*“Tarkenton’s business consultation service has been a powerful tool for helping us reach small business clients. Their consulting team has received rave reviews from our clients, and our retention numbers have been better than ever since bundling this service into our package.”*

- VP, Small Business Services

## the opportunity.

The Fran Tarkenton Small Business Network (FTSBN) launched in 1996 as a platform to help small businesses gain access to the buying power and price advantages enjoyed by larger businesses. Approximately 20 large companies participated in the program, providing special offers on their services to network members while in turn marketing the network to their own customer bases.

As the membership began to grow, Tarkenton recognized that member retention and growth would require providing more ongoing value, as many of the special offers currently included were one-time use only and lacked ongoing value. After experimenting with several different options, including early SaaS offerings and informational newsletters, Tarkenton came to the conclusion that a consulting service would be an ideal solution for multiple reasons: 1) providing trusted and experience-based advice would increase engagement and retention among small business members, and 2) providing Tarkenton with data on market trends to guide future decision-making.

## **the process.**

Tarkenton quickly moved to develop an initial version of the proposed consultation service that could be provided to partners and their clients. Tarkenton's COO at the time had previously been a practicing CPA providing tax, accounting, and consulting services to local small businesses. He became the first consultant for the new service, taking questions from members on any topic relating to their business, including marketing, technology, tax, and more. To launch the service, all questions were submitted and answered via fax, and every question would be handled individually and answered on a timely basis.

This phase revealed important lessons that would guide the development of the service. Questions ran the gamut from the broadest topics to the narrowest concerns. Some members were looking for precise answers to very detailed questions, while others wanted general thoughts in response to brainstorming requests. Some questions were asked, answered, and dealt with, while others led to an ongoing dialog as members reshaped their thinking and asked additional questions based on previous responses.

As the consultation service quickly became popular among the network's members, Tarkenton decided to invest resources to build a web portal to handle question submission and responses online. The company hired additional consultants to respond to the growing membership base, and built a searchable database to assist those consultants in their ability to efficiently handle the volume of member questions. In more recent years, Tarkenton has built a mobile app to allow members to submit questions on the go, customized for individual enterprise partners offering the consultation service.

## **the outcome.**

In its initial form, the business consultation service proved to be the engine for driving growth among FTsbn, keeping members active and engaged to improve both sales and retention. Meanwhile, the anonymized data from member questions enabled Tarkenton to recognize trends in the SMB market early, provide better service to end users, and be more effective on behalf of our enterprise partners.

Due to these successes, more partners approached Tarkenton about incorporating the consultation service as a white label service offering for their own client bases. Tarkenton leaders work with partners to identify how the consultation service would best fit in with a partner's current expertise and offerings, helping them position the service in a way that provides additional value to clients while also complementing the partner's specific strengths.

Business consultation continues to be a core part of Tarkenton's offerings, and the service continues to spur sales, engagement, and retention. Our consultants answer thousands of questions every year, as Tarkenton services members with unlimited questions and a 2-day response time guarantee.

The white label service Tarkenton provides to our enterprise partners and their clients is an effective differentiator for B2B providers, and our expert advice and guaranteed quality service are a positive reflection on any brand.

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