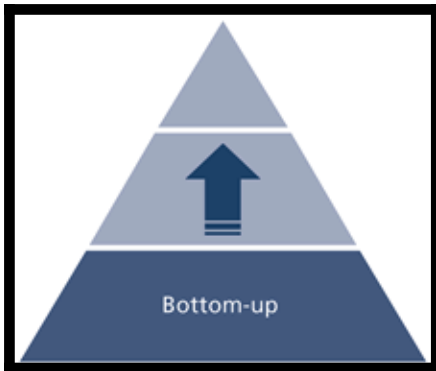


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# **4 SMB Case Studies Showing How Bottom-Up Employee Engagement Contributes to Sales, Profitability**

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In a post on the Business Insider blog re-posted from his own blog, GRP Partners\ Mark Suster argues that leaders should solve problems and drive innovation from the top. He writes,

*I challenge you to consider whether you're top-down or bottom up. In analysis there are always circumstances for each approach. But in leadership and entrepreneurship the top-down approach will be the right solution more often than not.*

Now, I get that Suster is not saying that leaders should engage employees from the top down 100% of the time, but he is saying it should happen this way the majority of the time.

However, in our experience conducting employee engagement research of small businesses as part of our annual workplace award program, we see that management and decision making can happen in many different ways to lead companies to success in the metrics that ultimately matter: sales and profitability. Our President detailed four decision-making approaches that run this gamut in these two posts.

Three of the four approaches she wrote about involve bottom-up decision making in some capacity. And in fact, in the applications we received for our 2010 Top Small Company Workplaces award, we saw bottom-up engagement factor prominently in the qualitative feedback of some firms that are performing quite well, even in this tough economy.

Check out four case studies that bear this out below. All four companies have been profitable in the last three years.

Application Question: How have your organization's people practices contributed to your top line revenue and bottom line profitability?

*Response by Bronto Software*

*8-year-old software firm from North Carolina*

*2009 sales: \$5.1 million; 132% 3-year sales growth*

At Bronto we have a sales team who is instrumental to our success. Because of our organic funding, growth comes from **bottom up**. Employees have directly influenced consistent new client growth along with amazing client retention.

Application Question: How does the organization encourage employees to participate in important business decisions?

*Response by Barhorst Insurance Group*

*17-year-old financial services firm from Texas*

*2009 sales: \$6.9 million; 16% 3-year sales growth*

Our organization is built on a foundation of **bottom up** planning! Every year we have the branch managers provide a sales and expense plan that is fed into our annual corporate plan. In 2008 and 2009 we completed or long term 2020 strategy to grow from 50 million in sales to 1 billion in sales. The strategy team was comprised of 10 mid level associates from each department. The team received feedback from

their peers and developed a strategic road map for the future. This plan includes monthly and quarterly progress reports to the leadership team. The strategy team will begin rotating new team members through in 2010. By using a **bottom up** method employees take ownership for the company's success and failure.

*Response by Intermark Media*

*11-year-old advertising firm from New York*

*2009 sales: \$92.7 million; 161% 3-year sales growth*

At Intermark Media we believe changes in the company should be driven from the **bottom up**. The employees who are interacting with our clients everyday have valuable insight into what processes work well and what changes need to be made to better meet the needs of our customers. We encourage all employees to be a part of our decision making process at Intermark Media. Weekly team meetings allow employees to voice opinions, discuss new ideas and solve problems. Team leaders encourage input from each and every team member. In addition to weekly meetings, leaders communicate daily through their email group to vote on awards, discuss ideas and concerns and get feedback.

Application [Buy cheap Cialis Online](#) Question: Over the last year, what kind of impact has the economy had on your business?

*Response by Man-Machine Systems Assessment*

*20-year-old consulting firm from the District of Columbia*

*2009 sales: \$8.6 million; 5% 3-year sales growth*

The economy has little effect on our business. We have continued to grow in spite of the economy and I truly believe this is because of the way we operate our business and the culture we have created. MSA employees feel safe, and know that the owners will do everything within their power to provide work, support their needs, and care for them and their families. This kind of loyalty is earned, and not bought. The MSA family is strong and the support we have for one another from the top down to the **bottom up** allows for strength and faith as we face challenges, like the economy.

**Related:** We tackled bottom-up staff engagement activities in greater detail with the help of CEOs from two of our previously honored small firms in this webinar.

View full post on [Winning Workplaces](#)

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