



ADVISORY LINK

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News Release

Women's Initiative Boosts Growth in Business

Dallas, TX — Surviving and prospering in the struggling economy has been a challenge for most businesses the last couple of years. However, one company has been growing by leaps and bounds, moving from 173 on the FORTUNE 500 list to 92 in just four years. Focused on growth, extraordinary customer service and outstanding products, MassMutual Financial Group (MMFG) attributes part of its success to its pursuit of and investments in, women's markets.

To achieve its goals, MMFG chose Advisory Link, a Dallas-based consulting firm with a proven track record in women's markets, to help them create and implement a national program of Women's Advisory Boards (WABs). Advisory Link spearheads the screening and selection of influential business women to chair each WAB and support its development and projects the first year.

"The WAB concept enables companies to tap into the most lucrative and influential markets to achieve their business goals and, at the same time, fulfill a commitment to social responsibility by addressing issues important to women," says Gerry Myers, cofounder and principal of the firm.

"WABs assist in marketing products and services more effectively to women, as well as recruiting, retaining and promoting more women into traditionally male-dominated industries," said Myers. "It is one of the most successful, innovative and cost-effective ways to increase a company's bottom line and differentiate them from the competition."

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In addition, the MassMutual Financial Group's WAB mission is to increase financial literacy/independence of women and girls by offering programs that benefit local communities.

"Advisory Link possesses a unique ability to identify, engage and enlist influential women, nationally and locally," said Diana Ruddick, VP-Professional Development/Communications, MassMutual Life Insurance Company. "The first year with Advisory Link, our company started local WABs for six general agents out of approximately 90 across the country. This year four of our nine national performance awards went to the local general agents involved in the program. The nine offices that sponsored Women's Advisory Boards this year averaged 146% of their stretch quotas. This is an amazing result."

Advisory Link's expertise in matching its clients with board chairs whose interests, influence and passion for women's issues mesh with their marketing strategy has yielded synergistic relationships and innumerable benefits. Because they are *external* boards created by an outside consulting firm WABs provide an objective perspective and connections to extensive outside networks lacking with internal boards. Advisory Link looks for clients who buy-in to the importance of the women's market at the CEO level and are willing to designate an executive woman in the corporate office to head the program.

The initial WAB in the MMFG family was started in Dallas, TX at HFG Advisors three years ago by Marilyn Harris. While reviewing her strategic long-term business plans, Harris decided to focus on three areas:

- Provide women education and information to make good financial decisions for themselves
- Offer them an opportunity to enter a career that had given her so much
- Give back to her community.

According to Harris, "I had been trying to do business with Asian-Americans for nine years

and could never make it happen. In six months my Women's Advisory Board introduced me to the key opinion leaders in that market. This year my company was chosen "Business of the Year" by the Dallas Asian-American Chamber."

Harris has seen remarkable results. "I have expanded the number of women in my organization, and all are doing well. This is putting food on families' tables and adding to the local economy."

Her advisors, likewise, are benefiting from the WAB. "I hear daily from them on new opportunities they have to help the community and build their businesses," said Harris.

Harris' conviction that WABs would open new opportunities for both women and the company compelled her to share this powerful concept with MassMutual Financial Group's home office.

"Women are represented across many market segments," said Harris. "Focusing resources on women's markets is good sound business."

"The creation of additional Women's Advisory Boards (WABs), comprising some of the most powerful and influential women in the country, has provided invaluable expertise, insights and support to MMFG and its corporate objectives on both a national and local scale," stated Ruddick. "Currently, Advisory Link has created WABs in Peoria, IL; Atlanta, GA; Vienna, VA; Bethesda MD; Los Angeles, CA; New York City, NY; Philadelphia, PA, and Pittsburgh, PA, in addition to Dallas." Boards are currently being formed in Detroit, MI, and Charlotte, NC." MMFG plans to continue expanding the program in 2005.

The newest WAB in Charlotte, NC, will have its first meeting in February, 2005. According to Tim Flanagan, General Agent, Hinrichs Flanagan Financial, one of the premier financial planning firms representing MassMutual, "Selecting the chair was an extraordinary experience. Interviewing six very successful women from different aspects of the Charlotte business community willing to spend their time listening to our story and helping us achieve our goals was one of the most amazing days I've ever had."

Sue Breckenridge, Vice President of Public Affairs, Time Warner Cable and Chair of the Women's Advisory Board says, "The Advisory Board's goals closely match what we are trying to do in my company. I am honored to be chairing a board that offers us an opportunity to generate productive, attention-getting projects that will enhance women's roles and future in the workplace and our community."

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