

Why Orlando's Acre Commercial tapped into Instagram and email blasts to grow other small businesses during Covid

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Richard Johnson for OBJ

Acre Commercial Managing Partner Sandi Bargfrede

Weaknesses

*The pandemic halted many retail real estate deals, which created a major disadvantage and economic anxiety for professionals working in the sector. That's because government restrictions and people's fear of going out in public slammed revenue for many restaurants and shops in the region. However, Central Florida's retail real estate sector bounced back when mandates were pulled back, and the state in recent weeks had an increase in deal volume. **Sandi Bargfrede** knew her retail real estate brokerage needed to change its business strategy when the pandemic shuttered restaurants and shops across Central Florida.*

Sandi Bargfrede knew her retail real estate brokerage firm needed to change its business strategy when the pandemic shuttered restaurants and shops across Central Florida.

Covid-19 put a huge strain on retail and restaurant businesses, since most people stayed away from stores — choosing to make purchases online instead — and restaurants have struggled as the pandemic kept people from wanting to gather indoors. It made it hard for real estate companies that specialize in that sector, too, like Bargfrede's company.

“Our company really thrives on cold calling, but you couldn't cold call businesses while they're trying to survive themselves,” said Bargfrede, managing partner of Orlando-based Acre Commercial.

So, Bargfrede decided to run a campaign to help small businesses. She and her agents reached out to every existing and potential client it knew and asked if their businesses were running specials or what information was important to promote to customers as Covid-19 upended the economy. Acre Commercial then pushed out that information through its Instagram and Facebook pages, as well as via email.

The result: It helped the local small businesses — and kept Acre Commercial's name top of mind. The social media and email campaign was among many changes Acre Commercial made during the pandemic to survive. The firm also looked at everything it spent money on and invested in programs it needed to pivot and grow. For example, Acre Commercial invested in software to do virtual showings as the pandemic limited face-to-face meetings, Bargfrede said.

“I believe it's something that sticks around because it's much more efficient. I can send a client a link and walk through the space with them over the phone.”

Fortunately, the pivot paid off. Acre Commercial ended up growing its business in 2020 by one team member and gave out raises to its employees. To keep morale up, the company also played virtual games and hosted virtual happy hours.

Business started to pick up, too. Central Florida's population grew as more people moved to the Sunshine State from New York and California. Plus, the company's clients that secured grant money and PPP loans didn't miss a beat on paying rent.

Looking ahead, Bargfrede predicts that restaurants will remain strong concepts in the future despite facing obstacles during the pandemic. That said, group exercise where people are close together may be challenged because people may be afraid of that environment. Of course, some retailers may shrink their footprints, too, as retail real estate continues to change in response to both the pandemic and rise in popularity of online shopping, she said.

“We were busier in the fourth quarter [2020] than we ever had been. I attribute that to vaccines and companies starting to look to grow again.”

Acre Commercial

What it does: Boutique commercial real estate services firm, specializing in Florida

Top executives: **Sandi Bargfrede**, **Willow Ferrelli**, managing partners

Headquarters: Orlando

Other location: Tampa

Employees: Five

Founded: 2015

Contact: (407) 392-2055

Website: acrefl.com

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Senior Staff Writer - Orlando Business Journal

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