

# CHARLESTON|ORWIG

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Charleston|Orwig Becomes 100% Employee Owned**

HARTLAND, Wis. June 21, 2018—After more than 25 years in business Charleston|Orwig, Inc., a Wisconsin-based strategic marketing and communications agency focused on clients across the food and agricultural industries, is now 100 percent employee owned through an employee stock ownership plan (ESOP).

“This move serves to further the firm’s strategy of remaining committed to what it sees as its primary differentiating asset—it’s people,” says Mark Gale, CEO. “Every employee now has a direct connection to our success. Our goal is to create an ownership culture with employees working toward a larger purpose. Every client will benefit from that kind of commitment.”



“When John Charleston and I founded the agency back in 1992, we wanted to create a legacy to carry on in the communications business long after we retired,” noted Lyle E. Orwig, chairman and founding partner. “Over the years, despite our rapid business growth, that familial atmosphere has not dwindled—it has strengthened. C|O is very much like a family—a high performance family. Our culture is at the core of everything we do and instilled in every person carrying a C|O business card.”

Orwig, Gale and agency President Marcy Tessmann announced that they each sold their 1/3 ownership stakes to the ESOP Trust. Now every employee owns a piece of the company.

Tessmann explained it was important to the firm to remain privately held and keep ownership internal as part of a people-focused business strategy established by Charleston and Orwig at the firm’s beginning—something employees have felt throughout the years.

“This is a somewhat unique move at a time when the marketing communications industry is continuing to consolidate. However, the partners felt strongly about maintaining our independence as an agency and the continuity that provides for employees and clients,” explained Tessmann.

“We invest in our employees,” she added. “Had we considered outside offers our consultants indicated that it would have been more financially lucrative. But all three of us believed in keeping C|O intact to ensure the company’s culture and founding principles continue. It has served us well for more than 25 years. This ESOP is an investment in the next 25 years.”

An ESOP is an employee benefit plan which provides company stock to employees as part of its retirement benefit plan. By becoming 100 percent ESOP-owned, all company stock is now held in trust by the ESOP. C|O worked with ESOP Partners of Appleton, Wis., who work exclusively with companies throughout the country in establishing ESOPs. Dewitt, Ross and Stevens attorney Tim Stewart, who also specializes in ESOP legal entities, provided legal guidance throughout the process.

“This commitment to our employees has resulted in loyalty that is essential to our growth,” Gale says. “We are extremely proud of the fact that more than 40 percent of our employees have been with C|O for 10 years or more.”

“And it’s not just the employees who are considered an essential part of C|O’s success, however, but our clients as well,” noted Tessmann. “Dairyland Seed has been a client for 25 of our 26 years and Arm & Hammer Animal and Food Production division of Church & Dwight has been a client for 17 years. And, of course, it will be just as important to our newer clients like the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and The Salford Group.”

“Our strategic thinking and client-centric approach resonates with our clients, as they bring these same types of qualities to their own companies,” added Gale. “While our clients are certainly focused on profitability and running a strong business, they also share our sense of purpose and understand empowered employees are key to success.”

Another customer benefit resulting from the ESOP is that it sets up a succession plan for the organization.

For employees, the ESOP represents an expansion of their current retirement program, which already includes a matching 401(k) plan as well as healthcare, dental and vision plans. They will now be rewarded with ESOP retirement benefits as a direct result of their on-the-job efforts.

Charleston|Orwig, based in Hartland, Wisconsin, is a full-service communications firm, providing expertise across all communications disciplines to clients throughout the food system—from the farm to the table. For more information, visit [charlestonorwig.com](http://charlestonorwig.com).

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