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MAIN STREET

From golf ball logos to a business

By Mark S. Murphy, Editor

The way Tom Kellogg looks at it, he's stuck. He figures that as recently as a couple of years ago, had he wanted to, he could have used his contacts to get back into the golf industry full time. After all, he had spent two decades on the business side of the game. But now he's been out of it for too long, and, as he puts it, he is "no longer relevant."

Fortunately, he likes what he's doing. And, not surprisingly, what he's doing has its roots in golf. Kellogg started his company, parsonsKellogg, in 2001 with one employee – himself – and a six-color golf logo machine, which he purchased on the advice of an "old buddy" at Nike.

He sold the balls, emblazoned with corporate logos, to corporate clients who handed them out at golf outings or to customers. Today pK and its 22 employees work with businesses to find the perfect high-end product to reward loyal customers or high-performing sales staff.

The numbers would indicate that the company is effectively filling a need. Last year's sales figures were \$6.7 million, and after just six months this year, sales are already at \$5.08 million. Not only that, but according to Kellogg, "It's a fun business to be in."

Kellogg enjoys the creative aspects, understanding what the client is trying to do with its marketing and finding exactly the right promotional product to communicate that image. Golf balls were a good start, but now the company lists 60 brands, including Apple, Polo Ralph Lauren, Kate Spade, Tumi and Bose, that it draws on to satisfy a client's need.

As a finishing touch, pK provides custom packaging made by local specialty box makers such as Benjamin Box and Mason Box – an extra detail that pK's clients appreciate.

It's a better ending than he might have expected when the Internet company he had worked for – Greens.com – ran out of money. Considering that he had spent most of his previous career working for Asics Tiger, Oakley and then Nike, it probably would have made sense for him to go back to what he knew. Instead, looking for his own business, he took the advice of his Nike buddy, bought the golf ball logo machine, and pK was born.



PBN PHOTO/MARK S. MURPHY

TOM KELLOGG sits among many of the products that his company, parsonsKellogg, supplies to corporations looking to reward customers or staff, including customized golf balls, apparel and luggage.

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Business as usual

Kellogg initially grew the company by using Nike as a base, fulfilling the corporate golf ball needs of Tiger Woods' corporate partners – TagHeuer, NetJets, Buick, Accenture, among others. So the company, whose name is an amalgam of its founder's middle and surnames, became known as "the golf guys," according to Kellogg.

Before long, he added other Nike items and Prince tennis balls, and eventually provided a full range of high-end products. As his customer base and experience has grown, so has his ability to pitch ever-bigger clients, such as Citigroup, Yahoo! and Clear Channel Communications. And as the size of pK's clients increased, the company has been forced to look for sourcing off shore, both with branded and non-branded products.

Because of the expansion of its operations, in February pK moved out of its original offices at Philipsdale Landing in East Providence and into a combined warehouse and office space of 12,500 square feet. This allows the company to keep needed inventory on hand for large rush orders or for embroidery requirements.

And pK may be headed for another growth spurt, as it moves beyond supplying promotional and corporate gifts (a market that Kellogg estimates to be upwards of \$35 billion per year) to creating Web sites and catalogs and running corporate events.

He is particularly proud of a relatively new product, a gift card that allows the recipient to "shop" at a pK-created Web site featuring products chosen by the company and its corporate client, so participants in a golf tournament, for example, don't get a hat or a shirt, but rather can pick what they want.

The company also expects to benefit from the growth up and down the Northeast Corridor. "We have started to go down to New York in a day to make pitches," he said. But he wants to bring potential customers to Providence and create a retail-like showroom at their offices. And after the sales briefing, he will take the clients out for some golf to seal the deal.

He is, after all, the "golf guy."

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