

Business

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Marketing firm has designs on diversity

Musicians, bank form client list

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

For the most part, the client roster of the Livonia-based Richardson Media Design is what you would expect from a marketing communications and creative services firm.

There's the National Bank of Detroit, the Hotel Pontchartrains, the Arthur Andersen and the Elliott's Floral Designs.

But as you run down the list, you come across some rather non-corporate sounding names. Who are Tracy Lee & the Leonards? Or the Chenille Sisters?

They're a couple of the musical groups who've had their album covers or promotional posters done by Richardson Media Design. That might seem unusual for a company whose bread and butter is the conservative corporate world.

Then again, what do you expect from a company whose pipe-smoking founder and chief executive officer has a guitar and small amplifier sitting in his office?

"I think there's a creative connection," said John Richardson, who plays guitar in a band called The Desert Water Bags. "We find that we can communicate with musicians."

THE COMPANY'S entertainment base is an all-star lineup of Detroit-area musicians. The late J.C. Heard, Mark Braun (Mr. B), Dick Siegel, along with the Chenille Sisters and Tracy Lee and the Leonards, are clients.

So is Ann Arbor-based Prism Productions and the University of Michigan Office of Major Events, which promote concerts in the area.

Media designers and musician make for great partners in creati-



A bank project contrasts with the Chenille Sisters' album cover behind Mike Griffin (left), John Richardson and Louis E. King of Richardson Media Design.

ty — not financial gain. "In order to survive in this business, you're not going to do it working with musicians," Richardson said. "We work with musicians because we like to do it."

"It's great for us because we get to make a much stronger statement. It allows us to stretch and stay fresh."

Along the musical route, Richardson Media Design has been honored for excellence in typographic design for its Von Leopold poster by the

which has been holding annual international competitions for 35 years.

Media design and music have been Richardson's two best friends. After receiving a master's degree in philosophy from the University of Toronto, he started a music magazine in Ann Arbor where he also played guitar in area bands.

Detroit Music Times was part-professional journal, part fanzine. The magazine didn't last long, but the friendships and connections Richardson made in the music field have

BUT IT WAS BASEBALL, not music, that provided Richardson the right pitch for his big break. As president and co-founder of Local Color Productions, he designed a poster for the 1984 Detroit Tiger season.

At first, the print was designed as a promotional device. Bought by the Tigers' pennant drive and the design of the print, which featured a light from the heavens shining on Tiger Stadium, sales skyrocketed.

The print sold for \$20 in poster galleries, but cost approximately \$1 to make. With 20,000 copies printed,

sales of the poster provided Richardson with the capital to start his own business in 1985.

"It was one of those lucky things," he said.

Richardson was in touch with Mike Griffin, with whom he worked at the Detroit Music Times. Griffin is now senior vice president and creative director at Richardson Media Design. He was also founder and president of Bralstorm Design, which later merged with Richardson Media Design in 1987. Griffin designed the award-winning Von Leo-

pard poster to promote the 1987 release of Von Leopold's compact disc.

In the merger with Bralstorm, Louis King also joined the company. King is president and chief operating officer of Richardson.

The Richardson staff has grown to nine. And everyone including the office receptionist participates in the creative process, according to Richardson.

ALL OF WHICH he believes helps keep Richardson Media Design at the forefront in a very competitive industry.

The company provides consulting, advertising, design and public relations services to clients. Along with the entertainment, the group works with those clients in high-tech and financial services.

"When a client asks for something, we want to surprise them," Richardson said. "If a client wants a blue, round object that is six inches in diameter, we say OK. We'll see you in two weeks."

"If we come back in two weeks with a blue, round object that is six inches in diameter, the customer is disappointed. They think, 'Heck, I could have done that.' We show them something completely different."

Richardson Media Design plans to continue to keep a diversified client base. The music side will continue to have a place with the corporate work.

Although their work has primarily been with independent record labels, Richardson said he would eventually like to work with a major label with an artist. He is hopeful the company will eventually expand into other media such as television commercial work.

Whatever the medium or whoever the client, the goal is pretty much the same.

"When you cut to the bone, there's really nothing separating from something being good for a musician and something being good for a corporation," Griffin said. "If the idea communicates the message that it's intended to communicate, then it's worthwhile."

Managing growth key to long-term success

By Mary DiPaolo
special writer

Achieving growth is something every entrepreneur strives for. As companies attempt to get bigger, there is a natural assumption that they will also get better.

But the process of working toward growth has spelled doom for thousands of businesses.

Statistics show that last year, more than 57,000 businesses failed. More than half of these were in operation for more than five years, pointing to mismanaged growth rather than business start-up problems. Joseph W. Duncan, Dun and Bradstreet's chief statistician, believes overexpansion or overly ambitious plans play a major role in three of every four business failures.

So how do business owners manage growth before it becomes a monster? Jeffrey Caponigro, executive vice president with Casey Communications Management, was charged with that task. Since joining the Southfield-based public relations company in late 1984, Caponigro was part of a five-person operation focused on expansion.

"Sooner or later, a business has to decide how small it wants to remain or how large it aspires to be," Caponigro said. As an example, he told how Casey's acquisition by Shandwick Corp., a British public relations company, "allowed us to reach clients around the globe while maintaining our autonomy here in the Detroit market."



Jeffrey R. Caponigro
conference speaker

For smaller businesses that may have ignored growth opportunities for fear of failure, Caponigro stresses the importance of where the company wants to be as an organization and then following through on the right opportunities at the right time. He also suggests to prepare for unexpected calamities such as economic downturns.

"There are several contradictions that face any growth-oriented company such as becoming too depend-

ent on its business plan and then missing out on opportunities that require it to quickly change directions. On the other hand, spending too much money too soon can leave a company over-leveraged if the environment turns sour."

For Caponigro, the need to hire, train and evaluate large numbers of employees at the same time represented his greatest challenge.

"There wasn't any doubt that we needed good quality people to meet the growing demand for our services, but we also had to develop a strong system so we wouldn't lose them as time passed. We spent many hours designing policy handbooks, training seminars and evaluation procedures, all of which were crucial to our professional development effort."

Caponigro will discuss his experiences as a growth strategist and counselor to business as part of the daylong Professional Communicator's Business Conference Saturday, May 6, at Oakland University. His luncheon speech is called "Working Toward Growth . . . and Handling the Monster Once It Arrives." Conference topics include presentation planning, legal requirements for starting a business, client-oriented financial relationships, marketing communications, desktop publishing, special events and working with the media.

Registration deadline is Friday, April 28. For information, call conference director Nadine Jakobowski, at 370-3120. Cost is \$110.



Mark Apple/Photographer

"I look for managers who have courage, energy, internal motivation, a do-what-it-takes attitude, and both technical skills and people skills. A good manager can synthesize input from all different areas and decide what is the right thing to do."

Douglas McDonald
Vice President
Dean/Walter Reynolds Inc.

In today's competitive environment, organizations are looking for well trained managers. That is why Walsh College has introduced a Master of Science in Management (MSM) degree program which focuses on developing business leaders.

The MSM curriculum examines subjects such as organizational behavior, marketing, human resource management, communication skills and financial management. For more information call the Walsh College Graduate Admissions Office at 689-8282. Classes begin in September, 1989.



Walsh College
Troy, Michigan

Walsh College admits students of any race, color, and national origin.

Magazine fills small business niche

By Peggy Aullno
staff writer

Just as business is booming for many small companies, Entrepreneur, a magazine for the small business owner, is enjoying unprecedented success.

"People couldn't even spell entrepreneur 10 years ago. Today everyone wants to be one," James Fitzpatrick, vice president and associate publisher of the monthly publication, said during a recent visit to the area.

Luckily for the publishers, not everyone wants to sell magazines that deal exclusively with the ins and outs of small business. In the dozen years it's been in existence, Entrepreneur has carved itself a niche and avoided competition.

"Nobody recognized the small business market before," Fitzpatrick said. "I think it's a function of timing. Now small business is booming and the magazine is riding that wave."

In June, the California-based operation is hoping to catch a new wave.

It is launching Entrepreneurial Woman.

"Four out of five new businesses today that are being started are started by women," Fitzpatrick said. "There's no magazine that addresses them."

Why start a publication geared to women?

"It's more difficult for women to obtain financing. The employer/employee relationship is different for a woman than it is for a man, just be-

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