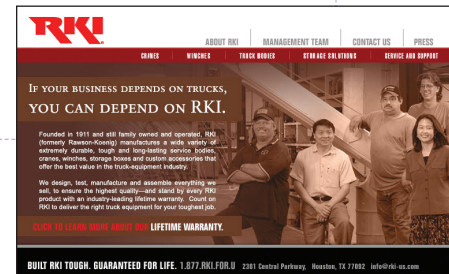




Branding means Business

CASE STUDY



The Challenge

When RKI, a commercial grade truck equipment manufacturer based in Texas, set out in 2003 to change the dynamics of the market after suffering from a three year downturn in revenues, President Tom Rawson was confident that branding was the difference they needed to be cash flow positive.

“We’ve been in business since 1911 through various mergers and partnerships, but we’ve never had a coordinated, pervasive brand strategy,” stated Tom Rawson. “I knew that now was the time to create a clear brand strategy that helped our market understand who we are, what we do, and how they can do business with us.”

Choosing Brand

Tom Rawson knew that for a business to grow you have two options: compete on price, or develop a brand. Unless you want to ride the slippery slope of tighter

margins, branding can ensure you don’t sacrifice quality of product (by trying to reduce too much of your operational expenses), while keeping customer care a priority. One clear rule of thumb when embarking upon a brand strategy, as supported in the book “Integrated Branding” by F. Joseph LePla & Lynn M. Parker, is to remember that keeping your current customers is priority number one. Clear second and third priorities for a brand-driven company are to ensure there are brand champions in your organization, starting from the top, and a focus on how brand drives actions consistent with your brand values.

Brand Action Plan

The first step for RKI was to identify their strengths and weakness through the eyes of all their key stakeholders:

- Customers
- Employees
- Management
- Distributors

RKI hired The Brandsoup Agency to assist them in changing to a brand driven organization. The process began by interviewing all of its stakeholders and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the company, its policies and its products. The management team, composed of a cross section of the company from manufacturing plant managers to customer service representatives, began to build an action plan that built on the strengths, and strengthened the weaknesses.

BRAND STRATEGY
MUST BE DEVELOPED BY
A CROSS SECTION OF
COMPANY MANAGEMENT
—BRAND STRATEGY IS
BIGGER
THAN THE MARKETING DEPARTMENT
AND MUST BE CHAMPIONED
BY THE MOST SENIOR
COMPANY MANAGEMENT.

BRANDING means BUSINESS

The next step was to begin taking two action plans:

1. Build teams to address each of the areas of weakness such as credit policies, delivery schedules, operational expenses and others.
2. Craft a brand strategy built on the strengths. Included in the brand strategy were areas of opportunity for growth such as the independent contractor market, and a core messaging platform built from key learnings from the RKI research.

All of the operational teams and the brand development team were focused around one key goal from which all of the brand strategy was being driven: the vision for the company. This is a critical first step to any brand development undertaking. The vision should be evocative, clear and measurable. And it can be uncovered through a series of 3-4 leadership team meetings to identify goals and dreams for the company. It is important to note that representatives from The Brandsoup Agency are included as members on the leadership team.

Setting a Vision

RKI's Vision: Grow the company 20% by expanding into the independent contractor market within one year. Increase profitability by lowering operating costs.

Once the vision was clear, and the operational teams in place, the implementation work began. Here is an outline of the next steps that were taken:

1. Operational teams met weekly to track progress in strengthening weaknesses
2. Leadership meetings held once a week to track progress of operational teams
3. Brand development team, which included The Brandsoup Agency, enabled agency to craft message platform, visual identity of logo design, and look created to differentiate RKI in the marketplace, and target audience and programs developed to reach audience
4. Tracking of awareness, response, interest, intent to purchase and purchase began and is an on-going process. Tracking happens in partnership with outside agency, channel and inside company managers. Be clear who owns the vital statistics to ensure programs are on target and driving business goals.

The Results

RKI today is growing and expanding, continuously building on its original vision. Today, over 25 new operational initiatives have been put into place, and RKI has been introduced to over 1,000,000 new potential buyers of commercial grade truck equipment. Sales leads continue to be generated from advertising and marketing programs, and interested potential buyers are tracked based on web visits, and 800 number in-bound phone calls. A simple tracking system can be put in place to track leads through the brand development and sales process. It is important to ensure the marketing and sales teams have a clean hand-off process for sales leads generated.

Today RKI is on target to meet its 2004 Vision of 26% revenue growth. Changing to a brand-driven company takes daily commitment in all aspects of business. Tom Rawson continues to challenge the organization to re-invent itself to better provide for its customers.

"We are a lot better today than we were yesterday, and we continue to learn and grow with our customers. This process has helped us gain better insight into our market, and the results are better relationships with our customers. And we're meeting our business goals which will ensure we're here for our customers tomorrow," Tom Rawson, President of RKI, Inc.



The Brand Continuum

About RKI

About RKI: RKI, Inc. has been recognized as the highest quality and favorite manufacturer of commercial-grade truck equipment available today, including cranes, winches, truck bodies and van equipment. Formerly known as Rawson-Koenig, Inc., the company was originally founded by the Koenig family in 1911 and merged with the Rawson family in 1987, and has been building quality commercial-grade truck products since the beginning. For more information, please visit www.rki-us.com or call 713-688-4414 or 1-877-RKI-FORU.

