

BizSmarts



Networking calendar Mix and mingle with our featured networking picks. Page 32

Executive Profile

Marc Katz

CEO, CustomInk LLC



The basics

Background: Katz, 36, stuck it out as a Wall Street analyst for a year after college before diving into CustomInk, which prints T-shirts. Even though he started as an entrepreneur in high school, making a business out of math tutoring, and CustomInk is crossing the \$100 million mark this year, Katz still thinks he's a better dad than businessman.

Education: Bachelor's in physics, Harvard University.

First job: A math tutor in high school.

Family: Married with two girls, 1 and 4; lives in McLean.

Business strategy

So why T-shirts? It wasn't my idea. It was a friend/co-founder and his mom's idea. It goes back to my creative streak. And the more I looked into the way the traditional industry worked, the more I thought there was a ton of room to improve it through the Web.

Biggest current challenge:

My first gut reaction was to say remembering all the new names and faces. Then I thought, "No that's silly." But, in all seriousness, CustomInk is evolving from a small to medium-sized company. It's so important we stay true to who we are and keep all the relationships strong.

Next big goal: We have been experimenting with television advertising and are excited about it.

What are you like to work for? I think people would say I'm very particular, very detail-oriented and terrible with time management, which I'm sure is frustrating. I think people put up with it because I'm generally, and genuinely, a nice guy.

Best lesson from your mentor: Not to be afraid of some failure and messiness. Ultimately, the biggest risk is to your ego by putting yourself out there, and that's not really a risk that should prevent you from doing something you think makes sense.

Judgment calls

Best advice from your entrepreneur dad: The hard thing

and the right thing are usually the same thing. The second, stay cash flow positive.

Worst advice from your dad: Well, he advised me not to do CustomInk. Now he's come around to be a huge believer in the company. It's sort of a family joke. His companies were always focused around business-to-business ideas.

Hardest lesson learned: Patience probably. I've watched companies that seem to just take off and go straight to the moon. Maybe those entrepreneurs know something I don't.

What would you change about your job? I would probably organize my office. It's a little messy. And get all caught up on my email inbox.

True confessions

Guilty pleasure: I'm relatively viced for caffeine. I need a couple cups of coffee in the morning to get ready. The stronger, the better.

Favorite T-shirt: A debut T-shirt my wife and I designed after our first daughter was born. We took her [to see family in] the Northeast. The shirts

say Madeline and have a stork on them and our dates on the back. It looks like a concert T-shirt.

Favorite movie star: I really like Steve Carell. Everything he does, whether funny or serious, is so heartfelt. Also, he's not a movie star exactly, but Ray Romano on "Parenthood," awesome show.

What did you want to be growing up? An artist. I loved drawing. Unfortunately, my actual artistic skills stopped improving probably around age 7, but I still got that creative streak in me.

Favorite book: Honestly, I read "The High King" by Lloyd Alexander when I was about 10, and it's still probably the most I ever enjoyed a book. In terms of business, "Built to Last" had a big influence on me.

Favorite movie: "Life is Beautiful." I only really saw it once, and that was enough.

Favorite restaurant: For work, I'm a regular at the McLean Hilton next door. With my family, nothing beats Benihana. And if I'm by myself, Wendy's.

Interview by Charlotte Kelly

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