



BRAND STRATEGIES
BRAD CIRONE



Olympic goals

Learn sales strategies from the games
A23

BUSINESS FIRST
THE CENTRAL OHIO BUSINESS AUTHORITY

SEPTEMBER 3, 2004

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Build bigger brands with less money

How do you compete with the big boys on a tiny man's marketing budget? It's easy, if you're willing to ignore your peers' judgmental wrath. To accomplish such a feat, you may have to employ some unconventional tactics, which at first glance could be viewed as a bit obnoxious.

These tactics may include, but are not limited to, the following: Piracy, manipulation, brashness, boastfulness, virally vigilant, counter-culture and don't forget deception. And that's just day one of the campaign. But hey, whenever money is replaced by fervor, something's got to give. During your rollout don't be surprised if they call your tactics subversive, but once completed successfully, they'll be re-classifying your efforts as brilliantly orchestrated and refreshing, while crowning you their small-business, brand-building guru. Still interested? Good, let's get to work.

First, stop trying to be brand Napoleonic (conquering) or brand omniscient (all things to everyone). Humbly narrow your sights of grandeur and win within a quiet niche of differentiation. Zamboni, the ice resurfacing vehicle did it; Kryptonite, the maker of the strongest bike lock in the world did it; you can too. You might find it surprising these huge brand names are owned by little companies with fewer than 100 employees and less than \$50 million in total sales. Yet, due to their brand strength, you may think these are \$250 million dollar companies.

So do what they did. Challenge yourself and all your associates to find a niche and be creative. It doesn't cost any more to complete the same task creatively versus mundanely. The difference? Cut through the communicative mediocrity when you find your specialty and express it clearly. Chris O'Shea, a world-renowned copywriter from Banks Hoggins O'Shea FCB in London, argues "a brilliant creative idea can have a multiplier effect on a (small) budget."

A Harvard Business Review study looked at 340 prime-time TV commercials and found that only 7 percent offered any sort of brand differentiation. Author Adam Morgan in his new book, **SEE PIRATE**, PAGE A22

PUSHING FOR ALTERNATIVE FUEL

Blacklick company's butanol production process seeks investors to grow



BY BRENT WILDER ■ FOR BUSINESS FIRST

The remnant of a Blacklick family farm is now the growth site of an alternative, agriculturally based fuel solution.

While the concept of using corn to fuel gasoline powered engines is not a new one, the resulting alcohol under development isn't ethanol - it's butanol.

Butanol "replaces gasoline gallon for gallon," says David E. Ramey, president of Environmental Energy Inc. and inventor of a proprietary butanol production process. "We're doing this out of the vision of ending foreign oil - period."

Although Ramey, 60, envisions countless acres of corn fields dedicated to butanol-as-gas production, his company is dedicating itself to ramping up production of the alcohol's formulation for the more lucrative industrial solvent market where it is commonly used.

Ethanol, which is best known to consumers as a gasoline additive, is a lower-carbon chain fuel than butanol, which means it has less efficacy per volume. Ramey maintains his proprietary butanol production process solves the problem of yielding sufficient butanol to compete with ethanol, even exceeding production per bushel of corn.

Environmental Energy is seeking investors to raise about \$3 million to get production from virtually zero to 250 gallons a week, followed by 2,500 gallons a week, which is the next stage in a study for which U.S. Department of Energy funding has run dry, Ramey says.

In 2000, his butanol production **SEE FUEL**, PAGE A22

Dave Ramey is hopeful his butanol fuel will one day replace gasoline and our dependency on foreign oil.

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FUEL: Company claims butanol process produces better yield

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method received a \$600,000 Department of Energy grant that allowed Environmental Energy to "prove the efficacy of our process patent" using Ohio State University lab facilities, he says. The second stage is production.

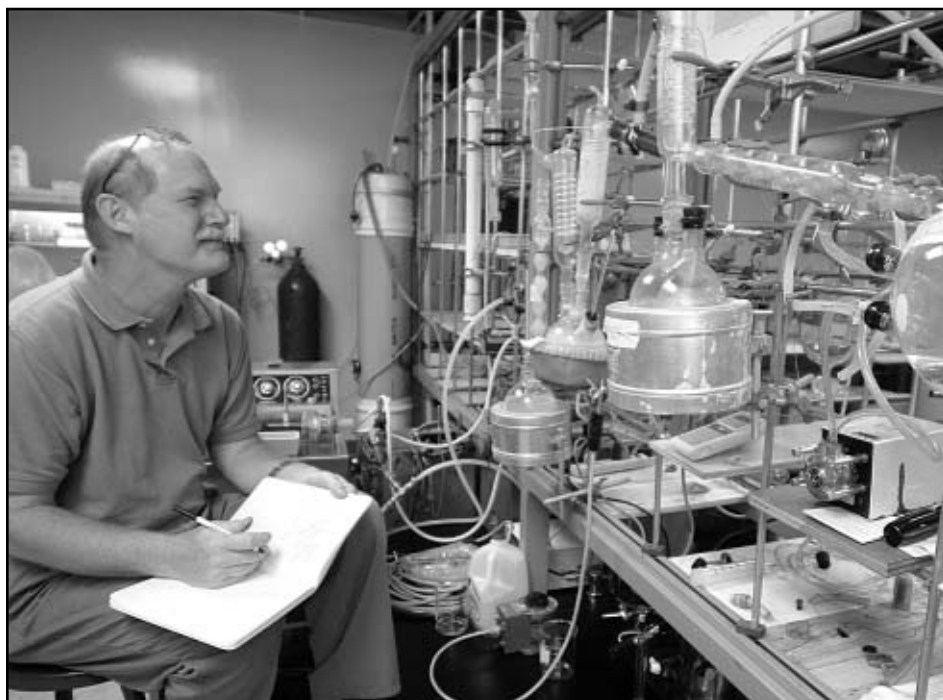
The subdivision surrounding the two-acre Environmental Energy site represents just part of the family resources invested in the company. In addition to Ramey's personal investments over the years, his mother made a major stock investment in Environmental Energy with proceeds from the sale of their 100-acre farm in the late 1990s. The company has also amassed 42 investors at \$5,000 a share since 1997, Ramey says.

Ramey had been considering butanol production for decades after reading about its production in the late 1970s, he says. The physicist had returned from a career with a Seattle, Wash. diode manufacturer cut short by the recession to form Sprouts Unlimited in 1976, an alfalfa sprout producing company he ran until 1991.

Although he "had a very rich compost heap full of sugars," Ramey initially decided butanol production at its established low concentration and low yield of 1.3 gallons per bushel of corn was too labor intensive even to produce fuel oil for his winter heating needs. It wasn't until 1990, when the city of Columbus ceased pick-up of grass and leaves, that his interest renewed. An acquaintance told him, "You can't put compost in your gas tank," and Ramey set out to prove him wrong.

From 1991 to 1996, Environmental Energy toiled as a Business Technology Center member, using the business technology incubator's former Summit Street location for research. There, Ramey perfected his proprietary microbiological process to produce butanol, which is the product of bacterial reactions. Ramey says he also received support from the Inventors Network of Columbus through his relationship with the center.

Ramey says his process doubles the yield from a bushel of corn, and in addition to generating 25 percent more fuel from the same raw material as ethanol, provides gallon-for-gallon equity to gasoline. It can also



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Scott Mowrey, operations engineer, works in the lab at Blacklick-based Environmental Energy Inc.

be transported using existing petroleum delivery lines whereas ethanol requires barge or truck transport, says Michael Collins, Environmental Energy's vice president.

Increasing production from the lab stage will take a significant investment, says Neil Drobny, a Columbus-based business consultant who has served as an adviser to Ramey for 10 years. In addition to seeking new investors, Drobny says Environmental Energy will also be tapping existing investors for further funding now that the company has proven itself so far.

"Our investors are not just money helpers, they are critical to the development of the technology," Drobny says.

He says investors are frequently "strategic partners ... who have businesses that can be benefited by our technology. We're working very hard not to go the venture capital route because we want to preserve as much wealth for our investors as possible, and we want to get to market as quickly as possible."

Ramey characterizes his development

team – in addition to Drobny and Collins comprised of an operations engineer and microbiologist – as volunteers.

"I've been a one-man show," Ramey says. "We were able to hire some post-doctors to help with the research through the Department of Energy grant, and those were the first staff that I really had. We don't have any paid staff – we're all volunteering."

"We have identified the team" of future employees, Drobny says. "We're out looking for investors right now, period."

If successful in bringing production to market, Ramey views butanol as not just a saving grace for the fuel market but a boon to Ohio's economy in corn production and processing. A pilot plant is next on the horizon by 2006 and then an Appalachian butanol biorefinery estimated at \$60 million of investment "leveraged with government aid," according to a company presentation, among other major investments.

The ultimate goal "is not to become rich; it's not to become famous," Ramey says. "It's to get us out from under foreign oil."

PIRATE: Don't be afraid of using new tactics to generate buzz

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"The Pirate Inside," deliberately argues a new manifesto of the marketer as a marketing pirate creating what he calls challenger brands such as Diesel. Even Steve Jobs of Apple Computers appears to endorse this constructive piracy philosophy as he said, "It's more fun to be a pirate than to join the Navy."

Next, save big on brand build costs by creating an epidemic. Viral marketing, word-of-mouth referrals from your customers, costs nothing. You remember the now famous Breck shampoo commercial that said "She told two friends, and so on and so on." Breck had it right. The cheapest, most efficient return on our marketing dollars is through referrals.

Every brand must strive to create an incomparable consumer experience that creates constant re-occurring loyalties wrapped in emotions and feelings (referrals). As a brand and as a company, it costs us little more to create these nurturing relationships with our customers versus cold transactional touch points.

Referral marketing is synonymous with trust. It is both engaging and cost-effective. It's so much in demand that it

has created a new referral process called underground marketing, or silent selling. Trained actors are planted on the streets and in coffee shops to generate interest in a product, such as a video camera or cell phone, by engaging other people in the product without using an overt sales strategy.

The willing prospect believes he or she has just discovered the product on their own accord, while in reality it has been successfully staged and specifically scripted. Underground marketing is extremely viral and perfect for brands with restrictive budgets.

Step three in building big-brand equity on a small budget – shameless public relations. Let's take our Kryptonite bike lock company. In order to get more press and promote its brand, then Chief Executive Officer Michael Zane conducted surveillance for 48 hours in a van with reporters from the New York Post, watching numerous thieves' unsuccessful attempts in stealing his bike. Public relations is not a press release, rather it must be astute and compelling, and it must reflect a differentiated, well-positioned, well-targeted brand.

Lastly, use technology. It is the great equalizer between large and small-brand budgets. Just like mega brands, small companies can cost effectively farm and capture new prospects online.

E-mail and advanced database technology allows growing businesses to compete with their Fortune 500 counterparts. You can quickly target prospects, create compelling advertisements and send it all electronically as part of an inexpensive and powerful brand building experience.

Remember, a big brand's sum total equity is worth far more than all its other assets combined. So build the brand no matter the budget. And yes, at least for a while, your constituents may ostracize you as a brand pirate and perceive your tactics as lawlessness, according to Morgan's book. But in the end, your new brand mutiny will work to create new brand opportunities and who knows, you may just become the captain of their ship.

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