



Ken Blass

President/CEO
Blass Communications



Kathy
(Blass)
Weiss

BLASS COMMUNICATIONS

Success Magazine: What does success mean to you?

Ken Blass: I measure success against three criteria that are important to me: relationships, accomplishments and contributions. Relationships relate to the strength of the bonds that a person has to family, friends and business associates. I am blessed to have a wonderful family and great friends whom I enjoy. I have been married for almost 27 years, and have a teenaged daughter who I am tremendously proud of (she is an avid equestrian). I am fortunate to be able to have my sister as my business partner. Having a strong marriage and a business partner who you can trust with your life is success in itself. Accomplishments for me involve business successes (assisting clients to grow their businesses, and providing rewarding careers for our team at Blass Communications) as well as personal accomplishments like competing in century (100 mile) tours on a bicycle or riding a camel next to the Pyramids of Giza. Finally, contributions are the measure of what you give back. I serve on a number of boards, and my sister and I are proud that the Blass family was able to endow a scholarship at Siena to help students further their education.

SM: How did Blass Communications get started?

KB: R.T. Blass Inc., the predecessor of Blass Communications LLC, was founded 39 years ago by my parents, Ronald T. and Yvonne Blass. Both started their careers in advertising working for very large agencies in Manhattan. Our father was an Art Director and our mother a Senior Copywriter. They moved upstate, where Ron joined the agency Woodard, Voss and Heavenor, and Yvonne raised a family. In 1969 they decided to form their own agency, starting it in the back of our home in Old Chatham. And the rest, as they say, is history.

SM: What type of clients do you service?

KB: Blass Communications serves an eclectic group of clients, from very large multinational corporations like Clariant,

to regional clients like Hancock Shaker Village and the Berkshire Economic Development Corporation, and hi-tech companies like Starfire Systems and Plug Power.

“ I feel that the solid foundation formed at Siena has served me very well.

What is common to all is that we look for clients who value an agency as an important partner in helping their growth, rather than considering us just as a vendor.

SM: What sets Blass communications apart from other firms?

KB: Blass Communications offers a broad range of services that many agencies have to outsource. We have highly skilled professionals in areas such as market research, photography, public relations and media planning and buying.

In mid-2007 we made a substantial investment in all new digital photography equipment. Our Blass Photography division is uniquely able to offer true film-quality photography with all the advantages that digital offers. Images can be shot at over 110 megs each, providing outstanding quality.

We are also specialists in branding, helping organizations to develop strategies to build their brand. Ultimately, all agencies are professional service providers. It is the individual chemistry and the collective experience of our team that makes us unique.

SM: Blass Communications is the oldest full service marketing and communications agency in the area. To what do you attribute the longevity of your success?

KB: The strength of family, our tenacity, strong ethics, and an abiding philosophy have been key for us. Being a family business makes a huge difference. In good times or bad, the family has always pulled together. You can't put a price on that. My sister and I are dramatically different people. This allows us to look at business issues from different perspectives with one common goal – to better the business.

Every business needs a leader with tenacity. Whether it is in business or on the tennis court, I have one overriding drive. Never, never, never, give up.

I think one's view on business ethics and the philosophy of the way you run a business are different when your name is on the door. Our business philosophy originates from our father. Strive every day to deliver as much value to our clients as we can. Try to provide a great work environment for our team, and treat our suppliers, vendors, and business partners as we would want to be treated – fairly and professionally.

SM: In what ways has the company changed since the beginning?

KB: I love this question because it reminds me so much of my father. He was famous for saying, "The only thing that you can count on is change." To this day, I can hear that in my sleep. The agency business is one that is constantly evolving. Our job is to continually break new ground in ways to help clients to build their brands and communicate with their target markets. R.T. Blass Inc. was founded 39 years ago by one person with a big vision. Over the years we have continually tried to be early adopters and continual learners. As markets and technologies change, we change. We offer new and different services to keep our clients abreast of new ways to communicate and grow their businesses. Clearly, the Internet has had the largest effect on us, as it has on all businesses. In 1994 we saw the importance of the Web and we launched GE online. We developed a website for GE Plastics, making GE the first Fortune 500 company outside of the computer industry to have a web presence.

SM: What are some of the challenges that you have faced as a family in business? How did you overcome those challenges?

KB: Every business faces challenges every day. All marketing firms are in a competitive environment, with markets constantly changing. Our goal is to try to stay ahead of the competition by continually embracing new technologies

and new ways of doing things. We try to address issues before they become problems.

A good example is the way that we managed the transition of ownership of our company. We started early, planned ahead, hired some talented professionals to help, and maintained an emphasis on clear communications among the team and the family. I actually started the ball rolling, but our parents deserve most of the credit. I think it takes a lot of guts to trust your kids and be able to step away and let them run the show. On the other hand, for many years before my father died he was always there as a "consultant" whom I could count on 100%. Eventually he became ill and passed on. It was a deep emotional loss that brings tears to my eyes to this day, but it was not a business loss because of all the work and planning that had been done earlier.

SM: What do you enjoy the most about your job?

KB: I take great pleasure in dealing with people – meeting with clients, potential clients, staff, and vendors. Planning, strategizing, and learning about their businesses and opportunities is clearly the best part of the job. I am passionate about the creative process. We brainstorm together to come up with new ideas. Here at Blass everyone is part of the creative process, and all are valuable contributors to the business. We listen and take to heart suggestions from everyone. My job is to take in all of that input and decide what to implement, how, and when.

SM: You went to Siena College. How did your experience there prepare you for success?

KB: I love Siena. Notice that I didn't put that in the past tense. I am still involved with Siena, long after my four student years there, and it is a relationship that continues to be rewarding. Kathy is also an alum, as are both of our spouses and one of our account executives here at Blass.

Siena gave me a broad base of knowledge. Over the years I have come to have a greater appreciation for the importance of having that well-rounded education. When you run a business you are called upon to fill many roles and interact with many different types of people. I feel that the solid foundation formed at Siena has

“ *It is the individual chemistry and the collective experience of our team that makes us unique.* ”

served me very well. Another aspect of Siena that is hard to overlook is the network of alumni that is evident throughout the business community here in Tech Valley.

SM: What is your fondest memory of Siena College?

KB: Considering that I met Karen, my wife of the last 26 years, as she was preparing to attend Siena evening classes, I suppose I should list that as my fondest memory. I can honestly say that all of my memories of Siena are good ones. From the very beginning, Siena was a special place for me. I graduated from Albany Academy, and on August 17 – just days before starting Siena as a freshman – I was almost killed in a motorcycle accident. I broke my back and was in the hospital for over six weeks. During that time, Siena students whom I didn't even know came to visit me (in Berkshire Medical Center, no less). That says a lot about Siena and the students who go there. I was also continually impressed by the practicality of the professors at Siena – always ready to listen to the students' point of view, always willing to help you work toward your goals, and always challenging you to do better.

SM: What accomplishment are you most proud of?

KB: As the business will be 40 years old at the beginning of next year, I guess I am most proud to have been able to continue to lead an organization that so many people count on. I am proud to lead a business that clients and staff members choose to stay with for a long time.

