



MARKETING STAR



Ward Pennebaker: CEO and Founder of Pennebaker Design and Pennebaker, LMC

[By Anique Gonzalez]

“We don’t believe the Internet is the only way to go.” Take a moment to let that settle in. That is just one of several proclamations made on Pennebaker Design’s website. In an age when many marketers believe that technology is both the wave of the future and the only way to go, some may view this statement as not only unfathomable but foolish as well.

Ward Pennebaker, founder of the marketing firm Pennebaker Design, graduated from Harvard University with a degree in social psychology and a specialization in learning and persuasion. During his last semester at Harvard, he took a graphic design class and quickly became enthralled with the field.

Upon graduating, Pennebaker got a job as a silk screener after he moved to Louisiana, where his soon-to-be wife was attending law school. From there, he transitioned his way through various companies and went from silk screener to production manager, art director, and, eventually, designer at Exxon, where he stayed for five years until founding his own marketing firm.

When it was established in 1984, Pennebaker Design was one of the leaders of the desktop movement. This helped to differentiate them from competitors. “We were about three years ahead of everybody. We were showing what the final publication was going to look like, and everyone else was showing marker renderings,” Pennebaker explained.

This use of technology encompassed everything the organization did. “We were the first company to do desktop animation in 1990, desktop editing, interactive multimedia, training, etc., and it was all because our clients were saying, ‘I have this problem.’ And we would look at it in terms of ‘What will motivate people to act? What are the best tools for that?’”

This begs the question of why a company that has relied so heavily on technology throughout its history would discount the Internet. The bottom line is that it doesn’t. According to Pennebaker, young clients, designers, and communicators believe that in the future, the Internet will be the only way to communicate successfully with consumers—an idea that he believes just isn’t true.

“We see the Internet as a significant and growing tool in the arsenal, but you need to find ways to connect with a variety of clients.” Pennebaker explained that individuals learn in different ways—for example, by listening, viewing, or touching—and that needs to be taken into consideration when attempting to connect with them.

“In psychology, particularly in the psychology of learning, one of the things that you learn is that the more senses that you can involve in the learning process, the more complete and the faster the learning takes place. And so the idea that you would be able to conquer all of that with just an electronic medium is, I think, wrong.” So while Pennebaker acknowledges that the Internet is important, he feels it cannot be successfully used alone.

Over the years, Pennebaker Design has continued to evolve, and today, the company specializes in marketing strategy, positioning, branding, and print and electronic media for various companies. It has also expanded to include a related company, Pennebaker, LMC, which provides message consulting, demonstrative evidence, and presentation strategies for litigators in trial.

In the end, what has enabled the company to thrive is a simple belief. “It’s all about business. It’s not about the art; it’s not about the pretty stuff that you can do. If you focus on the business drivers and how you can

Q. What was the last CD you listened to?

A. I’m a music fanatic. I listen to music virtually all of the time. This morning, I listened to Pink Floyd’s *Wish You Were Here*, then Peter Gabriel, Amy Winehouse, and John Vanderslice.

Q. Throughout your lifetime, what movie(s) have you watched the most?

A. *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Chinatown*.

Q. What was the last book you read?

A. Junk one or business one? [The] business one was *Blue Ocean Strategy*, and the junk one was, it was terrific, *The Tin Roof Blowdown*. It’s about a murder mystery after Katrina by James Lee Burke.

Q. What is your favorite flavor of ice cream?

A. Lemon sorbet.

Q. If you had an extra hour in the day, what would you spend it doing?

A. Photography.



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affect them, that's where the real success comes in," Pennebaker stated.

And knowing to whom you're marketing is a vital element of any company's business drivers. Pennebaker looks to men like Steve Jobs, co-founder and CEO of Apple, and Sony's founder, Akio Morita, as examples of individuals who completely understood their customers and the customers' experiences. This allowed them to ask themselves, "What is it that these people need that they don't even know that they need?" With the answers,

those companies were thereafter able to develop breakthrough and never-before-seen products for their consumer bases.

Pennebaker elaborated, "I think anybody who wants to get into this business and really make a difference—they've got to look to models like those guys [Jobs and Morita]. This understanding [of] your customer is so much deeper than looking at it from 'Our customers are 18-25 with a median income of x and [are] 60% male.'" More importantly, that essential knowledge has nothing to do

with whether or not you choose to use the Internet.

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