

Growth Tools

Image, brand and reputation

What Sarah Palin did for comedian Tina Fey's career, newly minted U.S. Sen. Scott Brown might do for the American-made pickup truck. Brown's suddenly ubiquitous truck-riding image is now everywhere and it smartly conveys the language of his candidacy — tough, unpretentious and one of us.

In a world where images have replaced words as the

language of our stories, symbolism and imagery don't merely convey an idea but are the idea.

But images, even powerful ones, can turn on us and communicate the exact opposite of what we were

trying to say. Fey's brilliant impersonation helped make Palin a household name, but not in the most flattering way. And Brown might well want to forget his truck if he were to break down on the highway and wind up on the back of a tow truck.

Like any asset, these images and brands need to be protected.

What are the lessons?

- Pick a true branding position that reveals what you or your company stands for.
- Consider that the images you convey will also be interpreted to reveal something about your reputation and philosophy.
- Protect your reputation as you would a legally protected trademark.
- Think simply. One powerful image is better than a thousand rambling words.

PETER MORRISSEY is president and CEO of Morrissey & Co., a Boston-based reputation communication firm.



THAT BRANDING THING

Peter Morrissey

ENTREPRENEUR | Making strides

Good Feet Boston

Innovation and commitment drive arch support franchise

BY SEAN MCFADDEN
JOURNAL STAFF

In the world of selling high-end foot care products, **Herb Knoller** and **Tevis Runyan** have discovered it pays to be fast on their feet — whether it's choosing the right location for their business or adding new elements to their marketing strategy.

The husband-and-wife-team are principals of **Good Feet Boston**, a brick-and-mortar retail business that's part of Carlsbad, Calif.-based **Good Feet Worldwide LLC's** national franchise system. Knoller and Runyan's business comprises six locations, which were opened between 2003 and 2008 — in Newtonville, Rockland, Saugus, Framingham, Lexington and Brookline.

Runyan and Knoller came into this venture in 2003 with prior corporate experience. She had been employed in the weight-loss industry as a regional supervisor, while he was a process engineer in pulp and paper making. They were eager to run their own show. And in Good Feet, they found a concept they considered to be a good fit for their aspirations. The business sells custom-fit arch supports that are said to represent the "ideal" height and shape of each of the four arches of the foot and that bring the arches back to where they function most efficiently. The products, which are available in 25 different styles and more than 300 sizes, are manufactured in California.

"I used it myself and got immediate results," said Runyan, 58.



W. MARC BERNISAU | BUSINESS JOURNAL

Tevis Runyan and Herb Knoller left the corporate world to launch Good Feet Boston.

Today, with 12 employees among the six locations, the principals are weathering the same challenges hitting many retailers: Their revenue, which came in at \$1.75 million in 2008, dipped to

\$1.4 million in 2009. Despite the drop-off, the principals are hopeful they can bring revenue back up to \$1.68 million

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

LESSONS LEARNED |

What positive changes has your company made over the past year as a result of the economy?



Brandon Kane
Woopid.com

In this increasingly computer-centric economy, the majority of out-of-work individuals need to brush up on their technical abilities, therefore we have focused on creating video tutorials that improve peoples' computer skills.



Peter Lafayette
Berkshire Bank

We started a new initiative that allows the communities we serve to participate in how we award some grant funds by voting for the nonprofit organization of their choice. This empowers the community and nonprofit organizations by allowing them to mobilize their network of supporters.



Scott Ragusa
Winter, Wyman

Over the past twelve months we have been more dedicated to our people development. We have always focused on our staff, but felt that this past year was a great time to build skills and knowledge that will position us for growth as the economy improves.

* **Next week's Lesson Learned:** Name the capital expenditure that paid off the most for your business. Send your answer in 25-30 words to cmahoney@bizjournals.com. Be sure to include a high-resolution headshot.

Business groups praise export plan, but want more

BY KENT HOOVER
WASHINGTON BUREAU CHIEF

Business leaders praised President Barack Obama's plans to increase trade promotion efforts and provide more loans to small exporters, but cautioned this alone won't be enough to reach his goal of doubling U.S. exports over the next five years.

The administration's National Export Initiative calls for a 20 percent increase in next year's budget for the Department of Commerce's International Trade Administration, bringing it to \$534 million. This would enable ITA to hire up to 328 trade experts to help U.S. companies find customers in foreign countries, with a particular focus on high-growth markets like China, India and Brazil.

The ITA aims to help 23,000 businesses to start exporting or grow their international sales next year. Over the next five years, the agency is shooting for a 50 percent increase in the number of small- and medium-size businesses that export to more than one market.

The administration also wants the Export-Import Bank to increase the financing it makes available to small- and medium-size businesses from a record \$4.4 billion last year to \$6 billion next year. Ex-Im Bank is an independent federal agency that provides loan guarantees, export-credit insurance and direct loans to finance sales of U.S. exports.



Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

The agency plans to expand its number of financial partners, take its road show to 16 cities and work more closely with the Small Business Administration's field staff to make sure small companies around the country know about its products.

The president also is requiring all agencies that play a role in international trade to develop plans to boost exports and coordinate their efforts with each other.

"This is the first time the United States will have a governmentwide export promotion strategy with focused

attention from the president and his cabinet," said Commerce Secretary Gary Locke. "This initiative will correct an economic blind spot that has allowed other countries to chip away at America's international competitiveness."

The plan also calls for the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative to negotiate new trade agreements that will give U.S. companies access to more markets and improve enforcement of existing trade deals.

Business groups said the National Export Initiative is long overdue.

"For too long, the United States has been standing on the sidelines while other nations are designing a new architecture for world trade," said Myron Brilliant, senior vice president for international affairs for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. "By standing still, we're falling behind, and we must act swiftly to regain the initiative."

"The U.S. export promotion program has been a shadow of what other countries do to support their exporters," said Frank Vargo, vice president of international economic affairs for the National Association of Manufacturers.

But major policy changes will be needed to double U.S. exports in five years, Vargo said.

First, the Obama administration needs to get Congress to ratify pending trade agreements with Columbia, South Korea and Panama. That "would lead to thousands of new manufactur-

ing jobs," Vargo said.

The administration also needs to modernize the export controls system, ensure currencies are fairly valued and reduce the U.S. corporate income tax rate, according to NAM.

The Technology CEO Council, a group of prominent high-tech executives, agrees that tax policies need to be addressed in order to make U.S.-based companies more competitive with their global competitors.

"To double our exports, U.S. companies need worldwide operations and supply chains that span the globe," said Bruce Mehlman, the council's executive director. "Tax policies that increase the burden on U.S. companies' global operations make American workers less competitive and undermine export-led economic recovery."

The Obama administration has endorsed legislation that would force companies to pay more taxes on income earned overseas.

But Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., praised the administration's focus on boosting exports by small businesses.

"Exporting gives small businesses the opportunities they need to survive and grow at a time when sales at home are low," said Landrieu, who chairs the Senate Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee.

KENT HOOVER can be reached at khoover@bizjournals.com.

GOOD FEET: Husband and wife learn to navigate franchise system

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 26

this year.

About 85 percent of their sales are generated by the arch supports, with an additional 15 percent coming mainly from the sale of shoes—the bulk of which are high shock-absorption athletic shoes from the manufacturer Spira.

The price range on the arch supports they sell, which come with a lifetime warranty, is between \$250 and \$300. Their indirect competition includes lower-priced versions that consumers might find in their local drug store. In fact, three of the Good Feet Boston locations are actually in close proximity to a CVS/pharmacy.

While keeping up with the demands of the business, which they described as "service-intensive," Knoller and Runyan have also had to learn to navigate their way within the established boundaries of the franchise system. Yet, they haven't been afraid to make changes within their own business.

For instance, instead of following the national model of advertising via 30-minute TV infomercials, Knoller and Runyan opted to run 30-second spots on local broadcast stations that would function as testi-

monials highlighting the issue of pain management for the products' users.

"We felt that was the best way to approach New Englanders," said Knoller, 68.

The principals have also done a fair amount of experimentation with the locations of their stores.

Three of their stores have actually been relocated to new sites from the time they were first opened because they weren't performing as well as Knoller and Runyan had hoped. The thinking is that by placing the stores in areas where there is a high level of visibility and foot traffic while it might be more expensive from a lease cost perspective the stores will generate higher sales.

Knoller and Runyan said it has cost them about \$60,000 to open a new store, and it generally takes them about three months for a store to generate

a profit.

They consider their biggest challenge, though, to come from increased competition from Internet sales over the past four years.

"As the Internet gained in popularity, it became easy for someone to mimic the supports and sell them on the Internet," Knoller explained. "That put us at a disadvantage."

Further, it's not the company's policy to allow Good Feet franchisees to engage in e-commerce sales, he added.

"Ours is a product you must be personally fitted for," said Leigh Woeller, marketing director for Good Feet Worldwide. "In order to get the maximum benefit, you really must come into the store."

At the same time, she maintained the company encourages input from its franchisees, and she praised Knoller and Runyan as "definitely innovative."

An example of that innovation may be Knoller and Runyan's plans to implement a "grass-roots" marketing strategy in the communities they serve this year. Enlisting the efforts of business development consultant Jacqueline Collins of Partnering for Performance in Abington, they have drafted a series of outreach activities. These include an in-store "free footprint" seminar that maps out the pressure points in the foot to help the individual understand the type of arch support that best suits them, educational seminars with physicians, and clinics for bicyclists, walkers and runners, to be conducted outside of their events.

"They believe in their product, and they understand it," said Collins.

Reflecting on her experience as a franchisee, Runyan said, "It's been eye-opening, and it's been somewhat confining. Yet, we are committed to this undertaking. This is Herb's and my life."

SEAN MCFADDEN can be reached at smcfadden@bizjournals.com.

A BIT OF ADVICE ...

Steve Rubin, president of the New England Franchise Association, said there are some key factors all potential franchisees should consider when undertaking the process:

- Find an attorney who understands franchise law.
- Choose a concept the franchisee feels passionate about.
- Make sure it's a concept that makes sense for that region.
- Pay careful attention to financing.