

Paul Cookson: Marketing Guru

From dining sets, skiwear to hockey legends and celebrities, Paul has the marketing to help propel anyone and anything to success.



By Jared P.D. Clinton

Before you read a single word, let's make this clear: you already know Paul Cookson. His presence is in your kitchen, on your countertops, and it's just down the street. Cookson marketed the products that occupy the space on your bookshelves, in your cupboards, and you've used a product he's been attached to at almost every turn. It's been that way for the last two decades.

It's also likely you've worn his products. Cookson was the man behind Muskoka Equipment Company skiwear, and for years he designed and manufactured Canadian Tire's Broadstone skiwear line. He's given Canada numerous NHL branded products – think tents, chairs, sleeping bags, Christmas crackers, gumball banks and 1/18 and 1/24 scale die cast model cars – and has been behind the sale of millions upon millions of blowout priced books throughout North America. Not only that, Cookson has helped you in the kitchen with Copperlux Cookware, at the dinner table with Reed & Barton Flatware, and he was behind the Snapware Food Storage containers that helps you clean up leftovers.



Paul with Deputy Mayor Norm Kelly (left) and Grant Fuhr (right).

However, Cookson decided to make a shift: he wanted a change from marketing products and consumer goods, choosing now to try to make a difference in the lives of other entrepreneurs. He took his expertise, transferred the skills to people, and four years later stands Ad

Army Group Marketing Services, Cookson's newest venture.

After working with supermodels, dentists, celebrities, and small business owners, Cookson, 47, sits alongside Grant Fuhr, NHL Hall of Famer and hockey legend, in a cream-white stretch limousine with an interior so large you'd need a roommate to split the rent. Fuhr, now 14-years retired and visiting Toronto from his home in Edmonton, AB., wanted to get himself back in the public eye to do more signings, appearances, and endorsements, so he turned to Cookson.

A magician of marketing, the ever-thinking Cookson had a

profile befitting one of the winningest goaltenders in hockey history, one with five Stanley Cup rings, and undoubtedly a legend of Canada's game. His work building Darryl Sittler's breathtaking website has helped build an even bigger public profile for the Maple Leafs legend, and he's been behind websites and marketing for present day players such as Zenon Konopka's ZK Wines, Cal and Ryan O'Reilly, and four members of the women's Olympic hockey team.

"A friend of mine that I grew up with did some research for me," Fuhr said. "She tried to find someone to do some marketing and some web design for me, and she came across Paul. He and I got to talking, and I decided I had to come to Toronto so we could meet."

What was to be a simple introduction was turned into an opportunity. Cookson immediately recognized that any time spent not getting Fuhr to where he wanted was time wasted. Fuhr, the author of a yet-titled biography to be released by the end of 2014, was set up with a media blitz of Cookson's creation. The goaltending great relived his best moments on the couches of Breakfast Television and behind the live microphones of TSN, Zoomer Radio, and Humble and Fred.

In one afternoon in the hands of Cookson, Fuhr transformed from that familiar face between the pipes of the Oilers dynasty of the late-80s to the smooth talking, calm and collected Fuhr that Cookson knew he needed to show off when he took the project on.

Getting the record-setting goaltender in the public eye is far from the first time Cookson has been there to take a career to its next peak. Vanessa Roman, a name made familiar by HGTV Canada's *Reno vs. Relocate*, has had her career taken to places she hadn't imagined possible, attributing the newfound success to Cookson.

Cookson saw the potential in Roman. After a cold call got Roman's attention, Cookson laid out how she could further her newfound celebrity. Already on television, it just made sense to Cookson to help turn the Halifax-based Roman into a veritable new media Swiss Army knife.

"He said, 'Listen, you don't have a very good website, you are not using this show to the full potential. I have a ton of ideas

Paul with Grant Fuhr on Breakfast Television.



for you,” Roman recalled. “It’s only through Paul that I even started writing a column, doing a radio show, thinking about doing other TV shows.”

Her real estate column, the one Cookson encouraged Roman to begin writing, has vaulted Roman to a recurring spot with Universal Uclick. Uclick was the home of the late Roger Ebert and his successor Richard Roeper, two of the most famous critics in the history of the medium. Exclusive company, to be sure.

What he brings, says Roman, is a method of mentorship and coaching that can propel a client to the next level, whatever that level may be. An absolute marketing guru, almost everyone you talk to will tell you that Cookson’s mind never stops working on his next great idea.

And his great ideas have propelled even lesser known athletes to success in their business lives after sport. Rachele Viinberg was a Canadian darling during her moment in the spotlight, standing on the podium to receive an Olympic silver medal for rowing in the 2012 London Olympic Games. When Viinberg was beginning to pursue her career in naturopathic medicine, she came to Paul.

“He catapulted my business,” says Viinberg. “It may have taken a bit longer, so I may have gotten where I am with word of mouth, but he really expedited the practice in the past eight months. It may have taken two years (to get where I am without him).”

But don’t get the idea that Cookson’s only interested in putting athletes and celebrities back in the limelight. With a roster like including the likes of international supermodel Monika Schnarre, rock star Michael Hanson, and Maple Leafs legend Curtis Joseph, Cookson has always has time for passionate start-ups, stagnant companies who need a breath of fresh air, or those which want expert help to build their business.

Cro-Mag, a men’s health and fitness program headed by Liam Robertson, a military officer of 14 years, needed a shot in the arm when Cookson got the call. Robertson had never met Cookson, but found samples of his work online and made

some calls, and not a single former client of the ad man’s had returned a negative review. It was six months after the inception of Cro-Mag that Robertson made the call to get Cookson’s help to change his business.

“Paul simply allowed me to focus my attention on the fundamentals of the business,” Robertson recalled. “I was kind of all over the map when I first was involved, looking at who I should go after, who should be my target market.”

Cookson taught Robertson to engage his audience, be it on the web or in person, and sell them on what Cro-Mag is with a visual approach. This three-dimensional idea – incorporating text, images, and video – has made the workout program’s website boom, with Robertson saying the compliments have been flooding in since the change.

Back at a crowded Hunter’s Landing surrounded by Ad Army Group clients like Viinberg and Jay Lowe, Grant Fuhr stands with Cookson and signs iconic merchandise: masks bearing resemblance to those the puck stopper wore during his playing days, miniature hockey sticks, and posters with his own face smiling back. In this one visit with Cookson, Fuhr has eyes on him again like he did during his days in the crease. And while she’s not present tonight, Vanessa Roman has the most poignant thought of the night.

“Anyone can have a successful business, a successful career, great brand strength,” she says. “All from just listening to what Paul has to say.”