

The Squeaky Wheel Gets The Grease



By Jared P.D. Clinton



(From left) Olympic silver medalist Rachele Viinberg, Boxer Brandon Cook, and Supermodel Monika Schnarre and Ad Army Group CEO Paul Cookson.

Paul Cookson's West Rouge based company, Ad Army Group Marketing Services' meteoric rise as go-to web designer and marketer to the stars might seem surprising to some. To Cookson, however, it's the manifestation of his main credo: The Squeaky Wheel Gets The Grease.

Born and raised in Scarborough, Cookson was taught dozens of lessons early in his life about how to find his own success. Some he had to figure out through trials and tribulations and others – like the turn of phrase you'll hear Cookson give to his clients – came from his hero, his dad, James Cookson.

"My dad is a brilliant man," says Cookson. "He was a salesman for Heinz, and he taught me everything I know about business without ever knowing he was doing it. I remember, maybe more than anything, that he used to tell me, 'The squeaky wheel gets the grease.'"

Cookson's business philosophy to this day centers on that idea. If you were to go down his impressive roster of clients, you would undoubtedly find a handful that the Ad Army Group CEO has sought out himself. Be it models, athletes, businesspeople, or celebrities, Cookson's got it all. And almost all of them have come because Cookson has been the Squeaky Wheel.



It started with a business idea Cookson had as a teenager: take college kids by the busload to a bar in Kitchener called Lulu's Roadhouse.

Cookson came up with the idea after realizing he could make a profit by filling the place, and all he had to do was come with the idea to the bar's manager. After running a few trips by himself to work out the kinks, he proposed the partnership idea in passing to a friend's mom. She scoffed, saying no one would listen to a "snot-nosed kid."

Turns out that's exactly who they would listen to, as Cookson did his homework, found out the profit margins, and made an offer to Lulu's Roadhouse to bring in busloads of college-aged men and women who were ready to party. He didn't let anyone tell him he couldn't. Instead he stuck to his father's advice: "The Squeaky Wheel Gets The Grease."

Or take for example NHL legend Darryl Sittler. In Toronto, and across the hockey world, Sittler is royalty. After all, there's only one player who can lay claim to tallying ten points in a single evening. Cookson's story about how he met and became the web design company for the Leafs' great might be just as legendary.

"I was at an event where there were a bunch of Maple Leafs greats, and of course I recognized Darryl," says Cookson. "It was one of the most shining examples of Squeaky Wheel because I had almost no time to get my message across but knew it needed to be heard."

Cookson waited in a line of nearly 500 people just to get one minute in front of Sittler. When he finally shook Sittler's hand, Cookson rattled off what he could do: build him a "Wow! Factor" website that would increase his personal brand and create business opportunities.

"I knew I only had about a minute," says Cookson. "But I took that minute, believed in what I could do for Darryl, told him that I had a solid base of other professionals such as Curtis Joseph and Eric Lindros

under our belt, and I had a plan for us. I let it play out and I think it was the next week when his people called me."

The boldness to make an elevator pitch to Darryl Sittler after waiting for an hour doesn't seem that crazy if you've met Cookson. He's got an energy about him, an aura, that lets you know just how much he believes in being the Squeaky Wheel.

Monika Schnarre is a name that surely anyone familiar with the fashion world will recognize. A world-renowned supermodel – and surely, supermodel is the only fitting descriptor for her career – Schnarre and Cookson teamed up to build an incredible website.

Said Schnarre: "Sometimes it's hard to communicate what you want the site to convey and it takes a few tries for a web designer to understand your vision but Paul understood right away what I was looking for."

And part of that understanding for Cookson isn't just being outspoken about what he wants to create, it's listening to what his clients want to see.

"Some of the websites that I love the most, that make me the proudest, are the ones that had the most client input," says Cookson. "I'll always come loaded with ideas, but when a client steps in and says, 'Change this, and also do that,' I love it."

His West Rouge based company's portfolio, which can be found at adarmygroup.com, speaks volumes about his love for what his company does, and the praise that you hear from his clients is almost unbelievable. The work is universally loved.

"I'm incredibly thankful for all the success I've had," says Cookson. "But I can't imagine I would have had any of these incredible opportunities if it weren't for me listening to the words of wisdom from my dad. He is the real Squeaky Wheel. I just hope I can pass that idea on."