



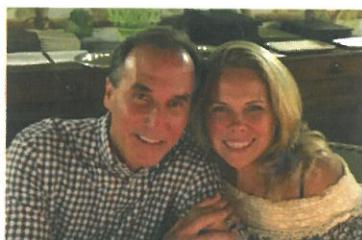
THINK PINK: SCENTS GET PERSONAL

BY LIN GRENSING-POPHAL

FRAGRANCE IS PERSONAL. What appeals to the olfactory senses of one individual may not appeal to another. Traditionally, though, consumers seeking opportunities to bring fragrance into their homes have been faced with pretty cut-and-dried decisions. You get this fragrance or that one, say vanilla bean or fresh linen. And, while a myriad of different fragrances exists in a variety of different forms (from candles to wax bars to essential oils), "what you smell is what you get," in most cases.

But not when you buy fragrance from Pink Zebra. Pink Zebra is different—hence its name, and its mascot, Paisley. Pink Zebra broke into the fragrance realm in 2011 by manufacturing fragrance "Sprinkles"—small beads of fragrance that customers can mix and match to meet their personal scent preferences. Today, the company offers a variety of other products—from simmering lights to shades, simmer pots, soaks, and even scented jewelry.

Pink Zebra's original manufacturing site and new headquarters are based in Sugar Land, Texas, where they held a ribbon-cutting in September. The company outgrew its first space and has leased a 85,000-square-foot location in the area, which executives say has a great environment for businesses and is centrally located. They have another manufacturing site in Kentucky. The real magic happens at these two manufacturing facilities,



TOM AND KELLY GAINES

PINK ZEBRA

FOUNDED: 2011

HEADQUARTERS: SUGAR LAND, TEXAS

TOP EXECUTIVES: FOUNDERS TOM AND KELLY GAINES

CONSULTANTS: 38,000

PRODUCTS: SPRINKLE CANDLES
AND OTHER CUSTOMIZABLE SCENTS
AND ACCESSORIES

Photo: caption



through an onsite pastillator—or “sprinklator” as company founders Tom and Kelly Gaines call it. This is a machine that makes granular pieces of soy wax for Pink Zebra’s flagship product. With a total of 100 employees in the Sugar Land location, the company has room to produce and distribute its own products as it looks to expand distribution warehouses throughout the U.S.

The Gaineses are no strangers to the fragrance business. Before launching Pink Zebra they made candles for other brands—including Pier One, Bath & Body Works, Walmart and Walgreens. They were financially successful, but they felt a disconnect from the end user. To drive that connection and focus on quality, they embraced direct selling. From the outset, Pink Zebra was established as a direct sales company.

The couple hired Colby Waisath, a consultant with direct sales experience, to help them launch the brand. Waisath, who now serves as Vice President

PINK STANDS FOR
THE POWER OF
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EACH ONE IS
UNIQUE. 

TOM GAINES, FOUNDER, PINK ZEBRA



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THE COMPANY HAD 300 CONSULTANTS AFTER ITS FIRST YEAR AND, TODAY, HAS MORE THAN 38,000 WITH CONSISTENT DOUBLE-DIGIT GROWTH IN ANNUAL REVENUE.

of Sales, says he was brought on board to help the Gaineses “connect with Mary,” a persona they had developed to represent their ideal customer, a woman everyone could relate to. “Because they were so heavy in the retail environments and because of the way the buyers bought products, they were no longer able to connect with Mary,” says Waisath.

IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED...

Entrepreneurs tend to be a tough bunch and don't take failure readily. In fact, when one idea or approach doesn't work, the most successful entrepreneurs will just tackle the issue from another perspective. That's exactly what happened with the introduction of Pink Zebra's signature product—Sprinkles.

Back in 1997, well before launching Pink Zebra, the Gaineses had tested the Sprinkles product through Bath & Body Works. “If it was going to be successful anywhere, it would be successful there,” Tom says. The store's approach is very hands-on and service-oriented, providing an opportunity for staff to engage with customers and to have the opportunity to tell them about the products. The product was distributed in 30 stores and, says Tom, “it was a complete failure.” Tom, Kelly and the buyers thought the product was great. The consumers, though, he says, “didn't really understand it—it really needed demonstration.” It needed the direct sales approach that would allow for that personal touch.

The Gaineses knew they had a winning product, so they didn't give up on their vision. They conceived of Pink Zebra as a way to provide the kind of demonstration and engagement they knew would make their idea a hit. Tom came up with the early concept, and Kelly was immediately enticed.



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**COLBY WAISATH,
VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES, PINK ZEBRA**

THE POWER OF WOMEN

The Pink Zebra name and logo have special meaning, because “Pink stands for the power of women,” and “zebras are unique in their stripes,” Tom says. “They’re like fingerprints—each one is unique. But together they’re stronger as a herd because the lions can’t pick them out. They’re all together in one confusing pattern.” Similarly, he says, “there are very powerful women that are strong individuals, but even stronger together—so that’s why we named it Pink Zebra.”

Consultants—and customers—love the concept, says Kelly. “The unique part of reaching consultants is that they can create their own kind of recipe, if you will. They all have the same unique fragrances to sell, but they can also use their ingenuity to blend their own creations.”

When the Gaineses launched Pink Zebra they were still producing candles for other brands as well. But, as Pink Zebra grew they soon realized where their heart was and where their focus needed to be. "We sold off all of the other businesses we had in

THROUGH PINK ZEBRA, THE GAINESSES WANT TO “CONNECT WITH MARY,” A PERSONA THEY HAVE DEVELOPED TO REPRESENT THEIR IDEAL CUSTOMER, A WOMAN EVERYONE CAN RELATE TO.



candles that were not Pink Zebra,” says Tom. And they never looked back. He adds: “We’re really, really happy and loving it.”

Through Pink Zebra, the couple was able to find the connection they were looking for. “Being able to listen to that end user directly is probably the most rewarding,” Kelly says.

Bringing warmth and compassion to all they meet, the founders have made the Pink Zebra culture a big driver in the company’s growth, Waisath adds. “Part of the reason I came here is that I fell in love

with the culture that Tom and Kelly had created in their old business. Pink Zebra was brand-new, but the culture they had created prior to Pink Zebra being launched really drew me to the type of people they were.”

In fact, it’s a family culture. So much so that company meetings are referred to as “reunions,” because the Gaineses are very welcoming and embrace everyone in the company. Whether meetings or incentive trips, they make the environments comfortable and inviting, Waisath says.

PINK ZEBRA

Pink Zebra's founders, Tom and Kelly Gaines (far right), celebrate the company's Group Directors.

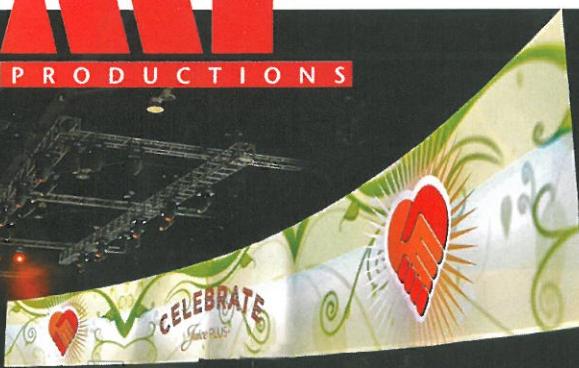


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DIRECT SALES FROM THE GROUND UP

When it came to the nuts and bolts of a direct selling company, Pink Zebra was established "from the ground up," he says. "We started from scratch and developed a complete system, with training and processes to support a direct selling model." Simultaneously, consultant numbers grew organically with recruitment through personal connections. "In our first month we had 22 people join and I can remember the CFO, and even Tom, asking, 'Is this really going to work?' and I said 'I think so,'" Waisath recalls. He was right. The company had 300 consultants after its first year and, today, has more than 38,000, with strong double-digit growth in annual revenue, according to Waisath.

The success of the company has been driven by a number of factors. Like any company, of course, product is foundational. The Pink Zebra product, and the ability for consumers to create their own scents, has been a big hit. It's a product that is also difficult for others to replicate. There are plenty of scented products on the market, but Pink Zebra's Sprinkles stand on their own.

The brand has been built on the power of this product and its strong, long-lasting smell. On their website, David Hoag, Vice President of

R&D, shares the secret behind what makes Pink Zebra smell so strong and last so long. He says three minutes is about the time it takes to turn the liquid wax into solid Sprinkles—a fraction of the time it would take to make traditional candles; that short timeframe, Hoag says, is another factor in helping to prevent fragrance loss. The company also is careful about what ingredients go into the wax: only ingredients approved by the International Fragrance Association, no “crop watch” listed essential oils, no phthalates, no ingredients considered harmful by California’s Proposition 65 or SARA 313, and no diacetyl.

Because of their prior experience, of course, the Gaineses had another big benefit that other startups don’t typically have. They already had the infrastructure in place for manufacturing and inventorying their products, including a 600,000-square-foot facility. “Many other companies have to invest in that over time as they can afford it,” says Tom. “We already had that infrastructure there.”

They also had people in place, Kelly notes. “We had all of the people who knew how to develop product, how to buy product, how to schedule a warehouse—all of those things. We all had tons of experience with developing product lines that had someone else’s name on it. All we did was create a brand for ourselves.”

Attention to detail and the ability to “connect with Mary” have not only fueled the founders’ success, but have led to a lot of fun along the way, as well as opportunities to impact others’ lives in very positive ways.

CHANGING LIVES

The Gaineses had been somewhat taken aback when a consultant told them that “if this business takes off, you’re both going to be overwhelmed by the people who come to you to tell you their lives have been changed.” But the consultant was right. Throughout the year, and at their annual “family reunions,” the Gaineses are inundated with input and gratitude from their consultants.

They’re grateful for their consultants as well and have taken steps to give back, recognizing the challenges that some of their consultants face in their personal lives. Their HEROES program—Helping Encouraging Rewarding Obtaining Education for



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KELLY GAINES, FOUNDER, PINK ZEBRA



Single moms—offers an opportunity for consultants to apply for free day care and scholarships. Single moms who are 17 years or older with children 13 and under, who have held a party of \$500 or more can apply to get \$500 of free day care. The scholarship program offers an opportunity for up to \$1,000. “Supporting them, helping them and encouraging them is what it’s all about,” Kelly says.

CONSTANT COMMUNICATION

At Pink Zebra there is no doubt about who drives success—the consultants. Training and frequent connections with consultants help to keep them engaged, says Waisath. In addition to annual reunions, Pink Zebra also holds rallies in a number of locations in February, May and October. It's a way to ensure that the maximum number of consultants can be involved, says Waisath. Annual meetings can be difficult for all to attend, given geographic barriers for some. Rallies, held in multiple locations, mean that consultants will generally need to travel no more than two or three hours to attend. The most recent October rally was held in 31 locations.

In addition to the rallies and annual reunion, consultants are also able to connect with each other via social media groups where they can ask questions, share ideas and give support.

The consultants bring their own voices to the Pink Zebra team and their input is highly valued. “We

try to be very engaged with consultants in letting them provide ideas and feedback to us,” says Waisath. “It’s pretty common for us to introduce something that has come from the field.” Those ideas can impact everything from process improvements to new product ideas, he says.

THE FUTURE

Looking forward, says Tom, Pink Zebra's future will include expansion into Canada in 2017. The team will also continue to explore how social media can help them reach their audience—particularly millennials—most effectively. The company just launched a new mobile app and are working on streamlining a number of their processes to be more efficient so they can build and expand, even going so far as to say they want their shipping to one day compete with Amazon, according to Waisath.

He again points to the Pink Zebra culture as the force behind the company and the consultants' success. “We have two owners who are just down-to-earth people. Success does not, or will not, go to their heads. They engage with everyone and make them part of the group. I think that connection with the consultants is so strong.

“They have employees who have been with them from day one,” he adds. “It’s a culture of wanting to be part of something—our consultants love the business and they love the company.” **DSN**