

A Local Brand of Talent

NEWPORT BEACH ENTREPRENEUR KATHLEEN WATTS SMITH SPECIALIZES IN SOPHISTICATED BRANDING.

BY LAUREN SIMON | PHOTO BY JODY TIONGCO



Kathleen Watts Smith, owner of The Brandmarket Inc.

If there's one thing Newport Beach entrepreneur Kathleen Watts Smith has, it's confidence in her company. "There's nothing we don't sell, and there's really nothing we can't brand," says the owner of The Brandmarket Inc.

From the smallest temporary tattoo to wrapping an advertisement around a bus, Kathleen sells branding campaigns and top-end promotional merchandise to corporate clients worldwide.

"We did one for Wimbledon once where we had jackets and watches and custom tennis ball sets for advertisers who were going [to the tennis tournament]," Kathleen recalls. "They got a gorgeous bag branded for Wimbledon, as well as a tennis racket. The guests were also invited to a meet-and-greet with the players, so they were able to get the players to sign their rackets."

Kathleen's business stands out in an unsophisticated industry known for its tasteless, cut-rate gifts, such as plastic pens and stress balls. "I positioned my company to be more of an ad agency and a promotional branding agency so that it did appear sophisticated," she says. "And in the end, the clients were going to walk away with something more sophisticated with their brand on it."

Kathleen's pledge to provide her clients with upscale promotional campaigns not only attracted Wimbledon to her client list, it also led to contracts with ESPN, Sony Music, Warner Bros. Entertainment, Atlantic Records, HBO, ABC News, Disney, Verizon, Condé Nast Publications, Tiffany & Co., Martha Stewart Living, Wine Spectator and Mattel. She also took home the 2008 Advertising Specialty Institute Spirit Award and the 2009 Women's Business Enterprise Supplier of the Year Award. Clearly, Kathleen has created her own brand of success.

Helping Others

A native of La Cañada, Calif., Kathleen moved to Newport Beach in 1992 after studying communications at Arizona State University. "I love the community and the people here," she says. "I love that it is outdoorsy and athletic."

Kathleen's first business here was Models One Management, a talent agency that she launched when she was only 22 and ran for a few years until she lost her investor. Undaunted, Kathleen moved to Los An-

“I’ve lived in LA, New York and Florence, Italy, but Newport is where my heart is.”

geles and started another company, Sterling Image Entertainment, a special events production firm that built a client list that included The Billboard Music Awards, Aerosmith Virtual Guitar Tour, Universal Studios, Hermès, Davidoff cigars and King Hassan of Morocco.

Kathleen moved from event production into music management and from Los Angeles to New York, Florida and Italy, but she returned to Newport Beach in 2004 with a third business venture, The Brandmarket. “I was able to take all of my contacts from entertainment and roll them into clients,” she says, adding that her first client after she opened in 2001 was Sony Music.

A decade later, Kathleen now gives back to the community through organizations such as Samaritan’s Purse, an international relief organization; Share Our Selves, which helps Orange County’s homeless population; and Kiva, which extends microloans to entrepreneurs around the globe. At The Brandmarket, Kathleen mentors college students from Chapman University and California State University, Fullerton by bringing them into the company for three-month internships. Kathleen is also a member of Smarty OC, an organization of women entrepreneurs,

and has mentored women in business through that organization and on her own time.

Erica Ziel, who owns Core Athletica Inc. in Newport Beach, is one of the local women who has benefitted from Kathleen’s guidance. “Kathleen has been a great mentor,” Erica says. “She always has a positive attitude toward business and life. She’s great to bounce ideas off of, whether good or bad, and I always know I will get an honest and thoughtful response. I value her opinions greatly, as she has proven to be a successful businesswoman and entrepreneur. She’s helped inspire and motivate me as an entrepreneur myself.”

Kathleen admits that she always wished she had a mentor to show her “the ropes.”

“I had to figure it out on my own,” she recalls. There wasn’t any course that I took; there wasn’t any book that I read. It was life experiences, and that’s what really got me through If I’m able to pass along some of that wisdom to women and help them out a little bit, it’s just my way of giving back.”

Having Fun

With all that Kathleen has accomplished in the business world, it would be a mistake to think that this 41-year-old businesswoman has a head

only for the books. Newly married to EZ-Up Instant Shelters owner Brad Smith, whom she met in 2007 at the Newport Beach Christmas Boat Parade, Kathleen also enjoys many recreational activities around Newport Beach, including boating (she and her husband have two boats, including a Duffy), bicycling the Back Bay and Crystal Cove, kayaking, paddle boarding and walking Balboa Island. A self-proclaimed “foodie,” Kathleen frequents The Dock, True Food Kitchen, A Restaurant and Bayside in Newport Beach, as well as Bluefin and The Beachcomber in Crystal Cove.

Kathleen is also passionate about travel. A few of her recent trips include visiting friends in the south of France, sailing in the Mediterranean, and touring Austria, Switzerland and the Czech Republic. She also travels to Oktoberfest in Munich every other year.

No matter where she goes, however, Kathleen is always happy to come home to Newport Beach. “When my sister and I were teenagers, my parents rented vacation houses in the summertime on Balboa Island, so from those happy memories, I always knew it was someplace I wanted to live,” she says. “I’ve lived in LA, New York and Florence, Italy, but Newport is where my heart is.” ♦



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