

THE POWER OF

FUN



BY KURT SMITH

Dave Raymond was the Phanatic's "best friend" for fifteen years, from 1978 to 1993.

IMAGINE BEING A BUSINESS OWNER who is looking to improve your marketing. You want a smart, polished, exciting campaign to bring life into your adequate but unmemorable image. You want to target a younger audience that otherwise might not discover your product.

Needless to say, this problem requires professional expertise, so you call in a consultant.

A consultant who, for much of his adult life, made his living wearing a furry green costume, recklessly riding around in an ATV and thrusting his ample hips at sports officials.

Because if your company is a minor league baseball team, and the idea is to bring more kids to the ballpark, and you want to create a mascot on that basis, hiring the original Phillie

“THAT FIRST DAY, I WENT INTO BILL GILES’ OFFICE AND SAID, ‘MR. GILES, WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO?’ A SMILE CAME ACROSS HIS FACE AND HE SAID, ‘I WANT YOU TO HAVE FUN.’ I WAS TEARING OUT OF HIS OFFICE THINKING, ‘WOW, THIS IS GOING TO BE EASY,’ AND HE SCREAMED, ‘G-RATED FUN!’”

Phanatic to handle the design is a no-brainer.

As the man behind arguably the most beloved mascot in sports, who today is the “Emperor of Fun” at Raymond Entertainment Group, Dave Raymond understands the marketing value of a fun diversion.

Even if he learned it by accident.

“The joke was that the Phillies got the kid that was stupid enough to say yes,” Raymond says with a laugh. “I was a student at the University of Delaware. I had my fraternity broth-

ers telling me, ‘They’re gonna kill you, they’re gonna hang you in effigy and set you on fire, and that’s when the Phillies win! When they lose you’re really gonna get in trouble!’

“That first day, I went into Bill Giles’ office and said, ‘Mr. Giles, what do you want me to do?’ A smile came across his face and he said, ‘I want you to have fun.’ I was tearing out of his office thinking, ‘Wow, this is going to be easy,’ and he screamed, ‘G-rated fun!’

“The first night I fell over a railing by accident, and people laughed. So I was thinking, I have to fall down more. Slapstick humor was something I loved, I was a Three Stooges fan, I watched all the cartoons. It was Daffy Duck and Foghorn Leghorn and Three Stooges because that’s what they laughed about.”

Dancing with the grounds crew quickly caught on, too.

“The first night I did that, I tripped one of the guys by accident, the kid tripped and fell, and people laughed. That turned into me running around the bases and at each base I would knock one of the kids over, and then we would all gather behind home plate and dance. Fans were giving us standing ovations, because they’d never seen the grounds crew animated!”

In a rabid and brutally unsentimental sports town, it also didn’t hurt that the Phanatic could so effectively taunt the opposition. Tommy Lasorda, who could often be described as a cartoon character himself, once even wrote a blog post titled “I Hate The Phillie Phanatic.”

Raymond gets along with Lasorda and has read the post. Their feud was usually friendly, but it could escalate: “One night he just snapped, and he came out and tried to beat the ever-lovin’ you-know-what out of the Phanatic.”

The two smoothed it over, but Raymond retains his proud Philadelphian perspective towards the Dodgers icon. “He’s a wonderful ambassador for baseball; the only problem with him is that he’s a Dodgers fan from Philadelphia. Worst type of traitor we could ever have,” he laughs.



Lasorda



Dave Raymond

“I understood the psyche of the Philadelphia fan. I was one of them! I hated the Mets, I hated the Yankees, I hated the Celtics. And the Dallas Cowboys, to this day, I see Tony Romo in a commercial about pizza and I run and turn the TV off. I knew the fans would cheer when I stepped on a Mets hat or made fun of the Dodgers. I wanted to do that, because I hated the Dodgers, and I hated the Mets!

“It was that type of thing, and you put all those together and make a cartoon character out of it.”

Today Dave Raymond brings a lifetime of experience as a world-famous character to Raymond Entertainment Group, which designs and builds mascots for sports teams and even corporations.

REG focuses on marketing the Power of Fun. It’s not an easy trick to blend two seem-

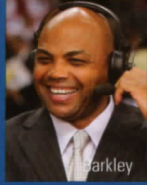
This Costume Stinks!

One service that Raymond Entertainment Group offers is costume cleaning... a surprisingly neglected aspect of mascot performance for many teams. The cleaning includes a “State of The Fur” analysis. A performer in a smelly costume is not a pleasant one, as Dave notes.

“The first year, the people in New York that built the Phanatic costume said they couldn’t wash it. You couldn’t even imagine what it smelled like. I finally just threw the thing in my bathtub with Woolite. I thought, I don’t care if I ruin it, it can’t smell like this anymore. When I got done cleaning it, it smelled great, and I wrote a note to the people in New York saying hey, this is how you clean it, and they were like, ‘Wow!’”

REG's "Angel Investor" – Sir Charles

Every business needs capital to get off the ground, and when Dave Raymond sought an investor for his idea to design and build characters, he found what he calls an "angel investor" who is well familiar with Philadelphia sports... Charles Barkley.



"When he would come to the Phillies games," Raymond says of Sir Charles, "he would have fun with the Phanatic and we did a couple of routines here and there, where he was smacking the Phanatic around. It was fun. Charles invited me to hang out with him and some of his friends in Birmingham when I was doing minor league baseball in Birmingham one weekend.

"Charles just wanted to help. Nobody knows that sort of thing. He has done that hundreds of times, he's just a generous guy, one of the best people on the planet. I'll be working until I close the business down to make sure he gets every penny back."

ingly opposite concepts like fun and business, but Raymond can speak from solid experience.

"I watched my kids become Phillies fans because of the Phanatic. They wanted to go to games because they had fun. And they learned how to watch baseball and appreciate baseball. My daughters fell in love with the players because they looked cute in baseball uniforms. And now they are not letting me leave when I want to beat the traffic. From a marketing standpoint, the Phanatic's building baseball fans."

So in dealing with clients, Raymond emphasizes how valuable—to their bottom line—their furry representative can be. The goofy character in a bird costume is a worthwhile business investment, and for it to pay off, it needs to be done right.

"The first thing we do is make sure they understand the difference between a kid in a costume and a character brand. A character brand is a living, breathing extension of your brand, and a kid in a costume is just that.

"We research who they are in terms of the organization's history, and who their community is in terms of the history. We help sketch out a back story that becomes the story of the character.



Tony Taylor and the Phanatic (Raymond)

"They look at designs and they play Mr. Potato Head, they tell us what they like or more importantly what they don't like, and then we go back and continue to draw until we get a design, we assign the copyright to that design, and then build multiple costumes for them. We help prime performers and train them.

"Also, what are you doing with the character brand? How are you rolling it out? How are you trying to get sponsorships? By the time we roll out the character, they should already know when they're going to make all their money back, and when they'll start making a profit.

"If they don't do due diligence, frankly, I don't want them as a customer. If they don't want the best, they're not gonna value the best.

"There are people saying I need a kid to get in my suit; right away I know that's probably a client I don't want. This is a character costume, it's not a suit. It's not a kid, it's a trained performer. If you don't want that, we're not the ones for you. It's a good thing not to waste time trying to make people buy from me. You're not going to be able to service everybody."

That's not to say that REG doesn't have a long list of satisfied clients; happy customers include the Cincinnati Reds, whose mascot "Gapper" is an REG creation, the Toledo Mud Hens, the Delmarva Shorebirds and the Phillies affiliate Lakewood Blue Claws, among many others. Raymond estimates that REG has created over a hundred characters, including at least ten for corporations.

"What separates us is that no one has the

track record of success that we've had for not only designing and building, but also helping clients make money, drive revenue and brand, find performers and train them."

It's a seemingly natural progression for Raymond: from being an eager young intern who spent sixteen years bringing an inimitable brand of fun to a community, to now supporting a family by showing others how they can do it too.

"I've been to a lot of business training seminars, and they always ask what your 'why' is. My 'why' is, I want my marriage to be great, I want my kids to have good parents, and I want them to grow up and get married and have a great family. Every time I get a check for something, I'm going, this is great, now I can pay my salary, and I can invest in what's important to me, which is my kids and my relationship with my wife.

"Also, I've been delivering this presentation, which is the life lesson that the Phanatic has taught me, how powerful fun is to building a family and raising kids or whatever you're doing. Using fun as a distracting tool is so powerful.

"That's truly what I love doing more than anything else, getting in front of people and telling these stories and hopefully giving them something that helps them. I'm focused on going into Philadelphia, in the corporate community, and preaching the Power of Fun."

If anyone knows how to appeal to sports types in the City of Brotherly Love, it's Dave Raymond. After all, he's lived it.

Analyzing "Franklin"

Dave Raymond did some consulting for the 76ers in the rollout of their new mascot, a blue dog named Franklin. Raymond believes Franklin will be a success, despite the recent "controversy" surrounding the character—that Darnell Smith, who wears the Franklin costume, was a Knicks fan.



"One of the things he said to me was, 'I really need to be a Philadelphia fan, you gotta help me with who the Philadelphia fans are.' Darnell is an awesome human being and an unbelievably gifted performer. I went to the first game that he was at just a couple of weeks ago and brought my kids, and he was kind enough to come up and interact with us. All the fans in our section were screaming for him.

"What's nice about it is that he recognized that getting in touch with the psyche of the Philadelphia fan was important. That just shows what a good performer he is. He's an asset to the 76ers organization; I'm glad they got him."

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Mascot Boot Camp

Although Raymond Entertainment Group trains performers as part of their character creation package, Dave Raymond also hosts "Mascot Boot Camp," where performers spend a week-end learning all about the business of being a character in a costume and non-verbal communication. It's for everyone from new mascots learning the trade to longtime performers looking to rehabilitate their skills.

"It's a deep dive into mascot performance, there's a real method to it now, where once it was Bill Giles telling me to go have fun," Dave says.

There's another important rule of mascot performance: keep it safe.

"Lighting yourself on fire and jumping off a building and crashing into the ground might be something that people will talk about from now until the end of time, but you're gonna kill yourself. And you're gonna ruin the costume."

"One of the things I miss the most about not working as the Phanatic is the connection to the Philadelphia fan base. Once Phillies fans love you, they love you forever, and it's almost impossible to do anything to get to the point where they don't love you.

"That was the beauty of being the Phanatic." ■

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