

Visualizing SUCCESS

Jim Gallagher communicates excellence—professionally.

“SURE, I COULD GO OUT AND DO EVERYTHING MYSELF. I COULD CREATE MY OWN WEBSITE, PUT A COUPLE OF POLAROIDS ON THERE AND SAY ‘LOOK AT ME.’ BUT HOW AM I GOING TO GROW MY BUSINESS THAT WAY?” says Jim Gallagher, president of Partytime Productions Inc. in Addison, Ill. Gallagher started the now hugely successful, high-end tent and event rental business in 1985 when he was a young college student. Its success is due at least in part to his belief that a company needs to let potential clients know the quality of its work through quality photographs and a quality website.

Risky business

In his sophomore and junior years of high school, Gallagher worked for a local carnival company cleaning the warehouse and helping unload trucks. When the company expanded its business to include renting 20-by-20-foot and 30-by-30-foot canvas pole tents, Gallagher became the one to do the installations. A short time later, after graduating from high school, instead of looking for part-time work while he attended college, he decided to try his hand at becoming his own boss.



Photos: Bart Harris/Chicago.

The first quality that is needed

VITAL STATISTICS

James Gallagher
Partytime Productions Inc.
Addison, Ill.
Since 1985

Provides premier tenting,
flooring and lighting
solutions for special events.

IFAI member since 1989
www.partytimeproductions.com

FAVORITE CHILDHOOD BOOK

*“Charlie and the
Chocolate Factory”*
by Roald Dahl



“Reluctantly, my parents loaned me enough money to purchase a 20-by-40- and a 30-by-60-foot expandable party tent from Anchor Industries,” he says. And so, in the teenager’s parents’ basement and one side of their two-car garage, Partytime Productions was born. “When I think back, my head spins,” he says. “What was I thinking?”

Initially, Gallagher expected to rent tents mostly during the summer months. “I thought that once September hit [things would slow down] but the phone kept ringing,” he says. “Clients would ask ‘Can you do Halloween?’ and then came November—‘Can you do Thanksgiving?’ It was always something that pulled me back.” Gallagher would go home on weekends to handle the events and during the week return to his college dorm room to study business.

A simple plan

Although Gallagher was a business major, he says he had no formal business plan. “I used [what I learned at school] to a degree but there’s nothing like hands-on learning,” he says. Whether relying more on best practices gleaned from a formal education or on an innate sense of good business, Gallagher took a serious approach to growing his company. He made sure to reinvest capital as the business made money and strategically took on debt to put rapid expansion into force. “Going out and getting money, that’s a temporary fix,” he says. “But making sure that the plan pays for itself, that’s all strategy.”

He was also aware that his youth could work against him when going after high-end clients, so he always made sure to “dress for success.” “Being on the younger side—late teens and early twenties—I always had to qualify,” he says. “I had to look right and I had to have the right materials because I knew my competitors were much older, much more experienced, and had much more [financial] backing.” Even though the company is now established and successful, and Gallagher doesn’t have to “qualify” any longer, he still doesn’t wear jeans to the office. “I think that since we’re selling a five-star product that we should look the part,” he says.

Hire the best

Gallagher carries that philosophy through to how he markets the business as well. He hires freelance photographers to capture the projects that the company provides services for. “As soon as I was able to afford to hire [a professional photographer] that’s what I did,” he says.

sf Review asks *What is your...?*

INDUSTRY PREDICTION

Despite the 2009 recession, good and well-managed companies will survive and prosper while others will fold and /or be forced to consolidate.

BUSINESS PHILOSOPHY

Good news travels at one pace. Bad news travels at the speed of light. None of us are perfect, but [in business] you can’t afford too many mistakes.

is audacity. ~Winston Churchill

Now, the company has four or five freelance photographers that it uses. “We’ve pre-interviewed them,” Gallagher says. “They know the angles we’re looking for. They know we’re looking for the interior of the tent and not close-ups of the champagne flutes and china.” Essentially, Gallagher is looking to capture in photographs as much of the work that the company has produced as possible.

Once the work is captured by the camera, Gallagher puts the images to good use by creating upscale print portfolios for the company’s sales team to use with clients. The company also had what Gallagher calls an “over-the-top” brochure created. And though it’s now four years old, the brochure is still relevant. “It has a great shelf life because we’re still using it and it looks like we just did it,” he says.

The company also puts the pictures on its website, and once again, Gallagher invests in the success of the company by hiring a professional to design the website. “Over time, I’ve learned what a workhorse the website is for us,” he says. “We get a lot of hits from it and over the last few years, the quality of the hits has improved significantly.”

Although Gallagher isn’t positive as to why the people viewing the website now are more likely to be a good fit for the company’s services than in the past, he thinks it may be connected to the quality of the site, including its key search words and its images. “We put up our first website in ’95 or ’96 because other companies I respected in the industry were doing it, but [at that time] we didn’t have a lot of passion for it,” he says. Now, with an updated site, he’s seeing an increased connection between the website and business generated.

Having those quality visuals—whether they are in the sales portfolios, on the website or in the brochure—helps communicate excellence and possibilities to the clients. “I can’t always paint that picture for people as to what exactly it is that my company does,” Gallagher says. “So I just show them our brochure or the website and say: ‘This is what we do.’

And they say ‘Wow.’”

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TURNING RESOURCES INTO REALITY

Drawing on a vast storehouse of tents, technical knowledge and creativity, Jim Gallagher and other Partytime Productions employees turn clients’ visions into reality. One of the company’s recent projects that’s garnering visibility and attention is the new Harry Potter™ exhibit in Chicago.

From April 30 through Sept. 27, Harry Potter™: The Exhibition is displaying artifacts housed in a 30-by-45-meter clearspan structure provided by Partytime Productions Inc. The exhibit by © Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. Harry Potter Publishing Rights © JKR, which is currently at The Museum of Science and Industry (MSI) in Chicago, gives visitors a first-hand look inside the magical world of Hogwarts™ School of Witchcraft and Wizardry as portrayed in the Harry Potter film series. The exhibit will travel to eight other venues after its inaugural debut at MSI.

ADVICE FOR OTHERS

Surround yourself with people who are smarter, better and stronger than yourself.

SECRET TO SUCCESS

There are no secrets—just hard work. You get up and out-produce and out-perform the day before.