



Robert Pasin Of Radio Flyer: Five Things You Need To Build A Trusted And Beloved Brand

An Interview With Fotis Georgiadis



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Dec 12, 2021 · 11 min read



Relentless commitment to build a great team — We are laser-focused on creating an outstanding workplace culture, as is seen in our many “best place to work” accolades, like Fortune’s #1 Best Small & Medium Size Workplace.

AS *part of our series about how to create a trusted, believable, and beloved brand, I had the pleasure to interview Robert Pasin, CEO of Radio Flyer.*

Robert heads Radio Flyer Inc., the business founded by his grandfather in 1917. Radio Flyer is an iconic brand that holds a special place in people's hearts because it instantly transports them to a happy time — to the best parts of childhood. Robert works with a wonderful group of passionate “Flyers” whose mission is to create products that bring smiles to kids of all ages and to create warm memories that last a lifetime. Company sales have grown significantly because of Robert's focus on building a highly committed and creative team. The product line has expanded beyond the iconic Little Red Wagon™ to include tricycles, scooters, and other ride-ons featuring innovative, beautiful, playful design. Robert is the Emmy winning producer of the animated short film, Taking Flight.

In 1991, Robert earned his Bachelor's Degree in History from the University of Notre Dame, where he served as student body president. After graduation, Robert taught 6th grade in Chicago's Austin neighborhood through the Amate House Young Adult Volunteer Program. In 1997, Robert completed his M.B.A. from Northwestern University's Kellogg Graduate School of Management.

An avid runner, Robert has completed numerous marathons, including Boston and a 50-mile ultra. Robert's favorite activities are creating family videos hiking, and riding Radio Flyer's new FLYER electric bikes with his wife.

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Thank you so much for doing this with us! Can you tell us a story about what brought you to this specific career path?

Radio Flyer is a third-generation family business, started by my grandfather, Antonio Pasin, in 1917. When I was five years old, my dad took me to work with him for the first time and I remember that day like it was yesterday. Walking into the front entrance of the building, climbing the stairs, saying hello to people while tightly gripping my dad's big hand. Walking around the factory with the loud noises of punch presses, the smell of grease and paint, and seeing all of those shiny new red

wagons on the conveyor line — it seemed like some kind of giant magical Rube Goldberg machine cranking out Little Red Wagons and sending them into the world to bring joy to families. That's the moment that I fell in love with Radio Flyer. I fell in love with the creative process of transforming materials like steel and paint and rubber into delightful toys. I fell in love with the idea that a wagon could become anything a child imagined it to be. And as I grew up, I fell in love with the potential of what Radio Flyer could become. When I was old enough to work at the company, I jumped at the opportunity and it has been a 30-year ride that feels like it is just beginning! I get to work alongside our team of FUNomenal Flyers creating and building something truly extraordinary. It's my passion and my life's work.

Can you share a story about the funniest marketing mistake you made when you were first starting? Can you tell us what lesson you learned from that?

In the 1990's, I launched a product called Angel Love Wagon Baby — a product you've surely never heard of. We even put TV ad dollars behind it, with a very 90s toy commercial. The product idea was the direct result of us observing customers who put dolls in one of our little toy wagons — I thought I was doing everything right. This observation, plus the fact that we received overwhelmingly positive feedback in focus groups as we tested the idea, led us down a path of excitement that was quickly deflated when product sales never took off. From that experience I learned that there is no surefire way to know if a product is going to succeed or fail. Regardless of the three decades I've spent in the industry, or the hundreds of products I've seen through development, I don't know which ones will be hits until they are. Even when you listen closely to your customers you can get it wrong — instead, you have to watch them and learn from their real behaviors.

What do you think makes your company stand out? Can you share a story?

Radio Flyer is a true legacy brand. We've endured both challenges and big opportunities for nearly 105 years, and I'm immensely proud of what our brand means to people. The toy industry can be a notoriously fad-driven, but our core products are designed to be passed down through generations. When my grandpa was building our company, he never archived any of the products through the years — he needed the sales. That makes it extra special when on occasion, we receive letters and products from Radio Flyer fans with vintage products to share with us. Until recently, I had never seen an original Liberty Coaster Wagon from those early years of Radio Flyer. But thanks to Ronald from Kenosha, Wisconsin, his grandpa's wagon from the early 1920s is now part of our collection. Ronald shared his

heart-warming story about how this wagon was passed down through generations — sisters to brothers, fathers to sons, uncles to nieces and nephews — and how it was the vehicle of countless childhood adventures. At Radio Flyer, our mission is to bring smiles to kids of all ages, and to create warm memories that last a lifetime. Hearing how that came to fruition in Ronald's story was a personal honor, but it was also proof that if you allow your mission to endure the decades, you can create a lasting legacy!

Are you working on any exciting new projects now? How do you think that will help people?

Radio Flyer is a pioneer within the toy industry and keeps that status alive by always evolving to meet the needs of our modern consumer, as seen most recently with the launch of our first ever line for adults, FLYER™, which features electric bikes and scooters for families on the go looking for a more sustainable, fun way to get to their destinations.

This line presents a huge opportunity for the brand and for our customers. We've been in the lives of families for generations, and with that sense of familiarity comes trust. We often say we're most people's first set of wheels, so Radio Flyer brings a name new riders recognize to the market of electric bikes and scooters, and people that grew up with us will appreciate that sense of familiarity in this fun, safe, convenient alternative to their traditional transportation.

Ok let's now jump to the core part of our interview. In a nutshell, how would you define the difference between brand marketing (branding) and product marketing (advertising)? Can you explain?

For Radio Flyer, it's about creating great products AND building love for our brand. Our quality products and cherished brand creates trust with consumers, and the brand is at the core of everything we do. Our branding campaigns are designed to bring to life the essence of the brand: inspiring imagination and making people smile. For example, to celebrate our 100th anniversary, we created a year-long campaign that brought to life Radio Flyer's deeply rooted brand identity of outdoor play, bringing smiles to kids of all ages and creating warm memories that last a lifetime. We rolled our World's Largest Wagon to Pioneer Court on Michigan Avenue in Chicago to hand out treats and offer kid-friendly activities to generations of fans in celebration of this major milestone. We're all about making generations of people smile and we thought what better way to say thank you to the city by hosting a day of smile-worthy celebrations.

Can you explain to our readers why it is important to invest resources and energy into building a brand, in addition to the general marketing and advertising efforts?

Building true brand authenticity is key to unlocking growth. It's no secret that most people know us for our Little Red Wagon, and there was a time in our 104-year history when that's all we built. In the past 20 years, we've launched dozens of new products a year, from scooters and trikes, to electric go karts and bounce houses. But, this wave of product innovation only started after a harsh reality check when our competitors introduced plastic wagons threatening our classic wagons. It was then we realized that Radio Flyer was an experience (not a wagon) company — our products bring smiles and create warm memories. That consumer insight unlocked our brand's potential. As you consider ways to grow your business, make sure you think carefully about what your brand means to people, what problems it can solve for customers, how it makes people's lives better, and — perhaps most importantly — why your brand exists. Don't chase the newest shiny object. Dig deep, listen to your customers, solve their problems, think for the long term, and unlock your full brand potential.

Can you share 5 strategies that a company should be doing to build a trusted and believable brand? Please tell us a story or example for each.

Our strategy is articulated in our mission — to bring smiles to kids of all ages and to create warm memories that last a lifetime. That may sound like flowery language, but we believe that if we take the following actions, this is what we create.

1. Relentless commitment to build a great team — We are laser-focused on creating an outstanding workplace culture, as is seen in our many “best place to work” accolades, like Fortune's #1 Best Small & Medium Size Workplace.
2. Act sustainably to improve our world — We are committed to building sustainable products and processes that help make our world a better place. We know this is our responsibility, and have taken significant steps to be a sustainable brand.
3. Deliver breakthrough results — The proof is in our results, and the fact that we never stop in our quest to grow. Even as a legacy brand, in recent years, profitability has increased tenfold.
4. Innovate products & inspire active play — Our company may be nearly 105-years-old, but we never stop innovating. This can be seen in our newest (and first ever) line for adult riders, FLYER, or with our exciting and recently expanded partnership with Tesla, with the launch of the Cyberquad for Kids by Radio Flyer.
5. Operate with outstanding quality — Our products are quite literally built to last generations. We will even help you refurbish wagons, and have an award-winning Customer Service team at-the-ready.

In your opinion, what is an example of a company that has done a fantastic job building a believable and beloved brand. What specifically impresses you? What can one do to replicate that? Lego. By focusing on their core brand attribute “Building” they have unlocked so many creative ways to grow — entertainment, adult sets, STEM, and more — and as a result they’ve become the largest and most successful toy company in the world.

In advertising, one generally measures success by the number of sales. How does one measure the success of a brand building campaign? Is it similar, is it different?

We don’t focus too much on measuring specific tactics — instead, we are more focused on building our brand over the years and developing meaningful relationships with families that last generations. One measure we do use is the Net Promoter Score to measure long-term brand health — our score is consistently in the high 70s, which is considered world class. To get there, our formula for success combines who we are (branding) with who we connect with (understanding our consumers) and how we connect with them (communication) to drive strong sales and brand preference. Our branding campaigns are designed to bring to life the essence of the brand: inspiring imagination and making people smile. And, a powerful part of our brand is creating cherished memories. We leverage the many stories we receive from consumers about how our products have brought smiles and adventure to their family, and also use them to help us measure success.

What role does social media play in your branding efforts?

We use social media to connect and engage with our community. We take our content a step further by including resources that apply to families’ everyday lives, like with our Play Panel.

User-generated content is also a large part of our social media strategy. Given the nature of our products and the love people have for the brand, consumers often organically tag us in their social media content. We capture stories and memories when engaging with consumers that help make our content timely and relevant. This was especially evident as we watched consumers use our products to get out of the house throughout the pandemic, and celebrate milestones in brand-new ways, like drive-by birthday parties and other outdoor get-togethers.

Similarly, we also use social media to listen to gain critical customer feedback on products, web design, promotions, and more, and use it as a tool in providing our top-of-the-line customer service through close integration between our Brand Communications and CS Teams.

What advice would you give to other marketers or business leaders to thrive and avoid burnout?

When it comes to running a business, some people forget about the emotional intelligence that is critical to leading effectively. Companies everywhere are feeling the effects of this unprecedented labor strain, so there's no better time to make expressing gratitude a habit — it's a proven driver of employee engagement. Before I was ever aware of gratitude as a leadership skill, I learned it as a life skill from my mom. She's known for her personal and genuine thank you notes that make people feel special. That's always stuck with me, and it's why I strive to show every Flyer my gratitude for their dedication and hard work. Employee recognition is low cost, high impact — take five minutes to thank someone on your team.

You are a person of great influence. If you could inspire a movement that would bring the most amount of good to the most amount of people, what would that be? You never know what your idea can trigger. :-)

I'm extremely passionate about getting more families to opt for bikes over cars. Bicycles and e-bikes are the perfect solution to many of our most pressing problems — environmental, traffic, obesity, stress. Our electric bikes are designed with everything a family needs to use a bike in place of a car AND they are super fun to ride. The more we can get people replacing car trips with bike rides, the happier and healthier we will all be!

Can you please give us your favorite “Life Lesson Quote”? Can you share how that was relevant to you in your life?

“It always seems impossible until it is done.” — Nelson Mandela

I have a photo of Nelson Mandela on my desk with this quote. He faced so many seemingly insurmountable obstacles that it puts my challenges in perspective and reminds me to keep working with diligence, patience, and humility.

We are blessed that very prominent leaders in business and entertainment read this column. Is there a person in the world with whom you would like to have a lunch or breakfast with? He or she might just see this, especially if we tag them. :-)

Bob Iger from Disney — Disney is a brand that speaks for itself, but Bob took the company to an entirely new level through amazing moves and great innovation. They're another brand with a rich history that maintains their mission, while also growing and adapting to change.

How can our readers follow you on social media?

Follow me on LinkedIn for insights on leadership, workplace culture, and the importance of fostering a legacy brand (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/robert-pasin-b2b0953/>)

Thank you so much for joining us. This was very inspirational.



WRITTEN BY

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