

THE BEST IDEAS ARE OFTEN BORN OUTSIDE THE BOARDROOM.

FIELDHOUSE

of dreams

By John Kinmonth



With clients in all 50 states, Fieldhouse, Inc. president Carl Lombardi Jr. displays a lot of school spirit.

IT was in the midst of blaring horns and brake lights that longtime Bellevue Club member Carl Lombardi Jr. and a friend envisioned a business niche that combined their shared sports fervor with entrepreneurial determination.

While most thoughts born during a traffic jam are best kept private, Carl and co-founder Jay Torrell decided to launch Fieldhouse Creative soon thereafter.

Originally created in 2001 as a collegiate and professional sports marketing and design firm, Carl added an online store and fund-raising outlet for schools and

youth organizations in 2003, which eventually became Fieldhouse, Inc.

Although the marketing and design portion of the company was eventually sold to a larger media outlet, Fieldhouse continued to grow, building more than 100,000 fund-raising Web sites for different organizations spanning all 50 states. Fieldhouse's online team stores allow a supporter, parent or fan to buy logo products from a school or organization. Fieldhouse also provides a connection for the school or business to the apparel suppliers and product vendors, which means the client

doesn't have to stock inventory or have minimum order requirements.

The success hasn't gone unnoticed. In 2006, Carl was selected as one of the Puget Sound Business Journal's "40 Under 40," an award that spotlights the top regional business leaders under the age of 40.

A self-confessed "sports fanatic" and former rugby player at the University of Washington, Carl previously spent 10 years at Spacelabs Medical, Inc. and one year at an Internet startup before the dot-com bust gave him the opportunity to combine passion with profession.

"It was a tough time, the economy was not doing well here," he says. Around that time, he and his wife Christina took a weekend vacation to Camano Island with Jay and his wife. On the way back, stuck in typical bumper-to-bumper traffic on Interstate 5, Carl and Jay penciled out their ideas for Fieldhouse.

While they quickly gained University of Washington football as a client because Jay had been designing graphics for the program since his student days, Fieldhouse's other early success was a matter of timing.

On a trip to visit his brother in California, Carl decided to make a side trip to visit several schools to see if he could drum up some business.

"The only school that would take my business was University of California San Diego," he says. "I walked in with a portfolio of Torrell's stuff, and they just happened to be in the process of reviewing what they were doing with their creative (direction)."

Timing hasn't always been positive for Carl.

Immediately after launching Fieldhouse, 9/11 transpired. At the time, Carl was getting ready to start selling sponsorships for an event at the Summit at Snoqualmie.

"The last thing we could even think of doing was calling people and asking them for money for a fun event when everybody was worried about the country," he says.

However, seven years and numerous product revisions later, Fieldhouse pushed past early challenges to become one of the premier sources for online scholastic sports fund raising.

KNOWING YOUR NICHE

As a parent of three children in elementary school and a youth football coach, Carl can relate to the needs of his clients.

"Sports were very important to me because I instantly met kids when I moved to a new school," says Carl, who moved often growing up. When he attended the University of Washington to study political science and economics, Carl was encouraged to join the school's club rugby team by several members of his fraternity.

"They knew I liked contact sports," Carl says with a smile. Although he played rugby for several years, his worst sports injury occurred when he received stitches from the errant elbow of a close friend while playing basketball at the Bellevue Club.

Nowadays, Carl coaches his 9-year-old son Carson in the Bellevue Wolverines junior football program, and plans to continue to coach his other two children, Anna, 7, and Owen, 3.

He says one of his two favorite things about owning Fieldhouse is talking with clients.

"It's a fun business to be in because we get to work with athletic directors, fund-raising coordinators, PTA presidents, and all people who have a passion for working with kids or nonprofit groups," he says. "They're people that are fun to be around because that's just the typical personality. So when we get a phone call from a client, it's usually a really cool conversation."

And what's his other favorite thing about Fieldhouse?

"We get to cut checks for people," he says. "It's nice to know that the money is going to things that are important."

For more info or to look for your team's store, visit www.fieldhouse.com.

Since its inception in 2001, Fieldhouse has blended two of Carl's passions: sports and entrepreneurship.



Go Wolverines! Coach Carl works with the Bellevue junior football program.

Five Reflections

Carl Lombardi Jr.
Founder/President, Fieldhouse, Inc.

FAVORITE BOOK:

"Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela" by Nelson Mandela, signed copy

BIGGEST INFLUENCE:

My parents

BEST ADVICE:

If your wife's happy, you're happy.

FAVORITE FOOD:

Italian—I love pesto.

FAVORITE ACTIVITY AT THE CLUB:

Television treadmills—they're great because I can catch up on the news.

