

In the HOT SEAT

Steven McGarry, Managing Director, Contact Marketing (NI) Ltd.

BRIEFLY OUTLINE YOUR CAREER TO DATE

After graduating in Business and Finance from Portobello College in Dublin, I was offered a job in the family business as a field sales executive for Favour Pet Foods. Over the years I have worked in various roles within the business and, last year, was appointed Managing Director when my father, who is company Chairman, decided it was time to take things a bit easier himself.

WHAT DOES YOUR CURRENT ROLE INVOLVE AND WHAT IS A TYPICAL WORKING DAY FOR YOU?

I oversee all areas of the business, which includes not only our own pet food (Favour and Clinivet) and pet treat and pet health brands, but also various other FMCG products outside of the pet category such as Sure baby products, Firelogs and a range of off-licence accessories. A lot of my time is focused on national and international sales development and product sourcing – locally, we deal with all the independents, but we also export our pet food and pet treats to the Republic of Ireland, throughout the UK and to several European countries.

WHAT PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL QUALITIES DOES IT TAKE TO DO YOUR JOB EFFECTIVELY?

While I believe formal qualifications are important and

a help, I very quickly discovered early in my career that practical experience is vital and most important of all is the ability to provide excellent service. You can have the best product in the world and offer it at a great price, but if you don't provide your customers with a high level of service, both from administrative and product availability points of view, then you may as well forget about it!

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR GREATEST CAREER ACCOMPLISHMENT TO DATE?

There have been a few, including identifying and cultivating several of our export customers. However, the most satisfying has been the development of our own brand of natural pet treats, which are made for us in Spain and include the likes of cooked Serano ham bones. In the past year-and-a-half, these top quality pet treats have enabled us to break into the multiples on the mainland for the first time and we now have full distribution with Tesco and Asda in the UK. That has been really good for the business and sharpened our minds towards further new product innovation under our own label, with a few projects in the pipeline at the moment.

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON LIFE HAS TAUGHT YOU?

Becoming a father a couple

of years ago has taught me how precious life is and that there's more to it than work! Before, I worked for myself, but now everything I do is for my family. Business is important, but personal family life is more important.

WHOM DO YOU MOST ADMIRE AND WHY?

Without doubt, it's my father Neill, who has helped me become the person I am. In a business context, his advice and support has been vital – and sometimes his lack of advice has helped me too by letting me find my own way.

WHERE IS YOUR FAVOURITE PLACE AND WHY?

I like so many places, but I spent four months in the US, mostly in Massachusetts, when I was a student and have been back several times since. My favourite place, though, is Las Vegas – it lets me indulge my fondness for cards and is great entertainment.

WHAT MAKES YOU LAUGH ... AND CRY?

Our Sales Director, Brian Sterling, always makes me laugh on a night out. He doesn't get out that often, but when he does he really goes for it!

As for crying, listening to some of the horror stories you hear on the news can choke me up. For example, that story a few weeks ago about the little girl killed by her mother and

stepfather was terrible. She had been so abused in her short life. It made me think of my own daughter and brought tears to my eyes.

WHO WOULD YOU INVITE TO YOUR DREAM DINNER PARTY?

I would want the actor Tom Hanks to be there. He has played some very varied roles and I am fascinated by his ability to portray so many different characters so well. I would also invite Muhamad Ali. He's my idol. I once met him briefly in Dublin, but really only got to shake his hand and exchange a few words. I'd love to spend hours with him, going over his exploits and experiences.

YOUR BIGGEST FAULT IS ... AND YOUR REDEEMING FEATURE?

Sometimes I can react too quickly to things instead of taking time to fully assess the situation. My redeeming feature is that I always try to accommodate people and make them feel relaxed in my company, both in business and from a social perspective.

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT YOUR JOB?

It has to be the variety of my role. I'm coming at it from all four sides of the table – sales, procurement and, as MD, I am an advisor as well as being advised by my staff. So it's multi-faceted and multi-disciplined, which means it's always interesting. Also, owning and distributing your own brands delivers great satisfaction. It's nice when I'm out driving about and seeing our Favour brand on so many forecourts – over the last three years we've really developed the large 15kg range in these locations, as well as in-store on the shelf.

WHAT DID YOU WANT TO BE WHEN YOU WERE GROWING UP?

I was quite sporty at one time and once had a trial for the Northern Ireland schoolboys' football squad. Unfortunately I had two left feet that day and the chance passed me by. I would have loved to have been a professional footballer, but

Becoming a father a couple of years ago has taught me how precious life is and that there's more to it than work! Before, I worked for myself, but now everything I do is for my family. Business is important, but personal family life is more important.

between that and subsequent injuries, it wasn't to be.

WHAT SINGLE THING WOULD IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF YOUR LIFE?

The complete mobile phone network going down permanently would be great! It would allow me to get a lot more work done without the constant interruption of the phone. It seems to me that the working day is a good two hours longer now than it used to be and that's because so much time is spent on the mobile. It's not that many years ago that we managed our business perfectly well without them!

WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST EXTRAVAGANCE?

It's the amount I spend on golfing apparel. Maybe I'm trying too hard to look like a golfer to hide the fact that my swing leaves a bit to be desired!

WHAT TRAIT DO YOU MOST DEPLORE IN OTHERS?

I hate people who are economical with the truth. They're not necessarily telling lies, but are failing to be open and frank with the whole story. I'd rather hear bad news early on and deal with it immediately, as opposed to someone flapping round it for a while and the situation possibly getting worse because of the delay. I always tell staff, if something bad happens, let us know the full facts immediately, so we can sort it out.

YOUR FOOD VICE IS?

Chinese. The staff in my local takeaway knows me so well they don't even have to ask what I want – it's always special fried rice with gravy.

HOW DO YOU RELAX?

A round of golf, nice and early in the morning, followed by a few jars and a bit of craic with friends. Then Sunday is family day.

WHAT ARE YOUR ALL-TIME TOP FIVE GROCERY BRANDS?

Tayto prawn cocktail crisps, Club Orange, Toberlone, Guinness and, of course, Favour pet food – my German Shepherd wouldn't eat anything else!

