

Big mag
on campus
Campus Visit Inc.
showcases Hub schools.
Small Business, Page 26



KATHY CHAPMAN / BUSINESS JOURNAL

Todd and Cherlene Hoffman, founders and owners of Campus Visit Inc. in Boston, have turned their magazine and travel reservation service into a profitable venture that promotes Boston to high school students considering going to college at any of 15 local schools.

Bonding with Beantown

Campus Visit Inc. brings Boston to life for prospective students through magazine

BY ROBERTA HOLLAND
JOURNAL STAFF

As college hopefuls stream into Boston by the thousands, Cherlene and Todd Hoffman want to help them. They help them find hotels, visit the aquarium and navigate among different colleges for visits.

Most importantly, they help them bond with Boston.

The husband and wife team are the founders and owners of Campus Visit Inc., a Boston-based company that puts out a glossy magazine geared specifically to visiting college applicants and their parents. The company has branched out into a reservation service for hotels and other amenities in Boston through a toll-free number

and World Wide Web site — www.campusvisit.com — offering travel and hotel discounts.

“We’re really trying to promote Boston as the place the world comes to learn,” said Todd Hoffman, a former marketing director for the Saunders Hotel Group and the Park Plaza Hotel, who got the idea for the company during a brainstorming session.

Hoffman said no one had figured out how to tap the student market with its potential for lucrative repeat business from the parents. With about 50 schools within 50 miles, many parents visit as often as eight times between orien-



tation and graduation, Hoffman said.

The company sells advertising to local hotels, restaurants, museums, and attractions. The magazine includes a calendar of events, a chart listing mileage between various colleges and tips on getting the most out of a visit.

Because their audience usually has 100 percent turnover from one year to the next, the editorial content mainly stays the same.

Please see VISIT, Page 53

Campus Visit: Bringing Boston to life

continued from page 26

Colleges buy thousands of magazines from Campus Visit and mail them directly to students with the rest of their materials or keep them in the lobbies of their admissions offices.

Incorporated in 1995, Campus Visit published its first issue that year as well. The company now works with 15 local colleges and universities, including Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Berklee College of Music and Boston University. Schools become partners with Campus Visit for between \$10,000 and \$20,000 a year. The only two big schools in the area that don't participate are Boston College and Babson College.

Cherlene put aside her freelance video and television production work to start the company in 1994, running it by herself until 1997. She said as she went school to school, she realized the colleges didn't have any materials promoting the city of Boston itself. There was a tremendous opportunity to be a bridge between tourism and academia, she said.

"It's a win for the colleges, for Boston's tourism industry and for the visitor who gets more information," Hoffman said.

The Hoffmans used about \$5,000 of their own money to launch the business. They solicit articles and photos from various admissions directors, check the editorial content with each school and put out one issue a year.

"It's such a no-brainer," Cherlene Hoffman said. "It makes complete sense. When we first launched it, it was really new. The schools had never worked together and it was unusual for them to send something out with advertising in it."

They printed 140,000 copies of the 1999 edition.

Patrick Moscaritolo, head of the Greater Boston Convention and Visitors Bureau, said Campus Visit is wonderful for the city of Boston and the individual schools. Visits usually last between one to three days and pump between \$80 million and \$100

million into the Boston economy each year, he said.

"It's absolutely terrific for our visitor industry," Moscaritolo said. "It positions Boston in such a way that we can now understand the role these colleges play in the life of our city and in our economy."

The company's future plans include going after the graduate student, alumni and international student markets, launching a marketing campaign geared at retaining college students after graduation, and possible expansion into other cities. Springfield and Philadelphia already have been talking to the Hoffmans about launching similar programs there.

The Hoffmans have one other employee, and hire contractors to design and print the magazine. They built their company without outside investors or loans.

"The bottom line is Boston is a wonderful city. We want the prospects and their parents to come here and have a wonderful time, both on campus and off campus," Cherlene Hoffman said. "It's not like they're going to Spokane, Washington."

Local school officials said the Hoffmans have come up with a winning idea.

"We have been very supportive of the idea that there is some synergy between the colleges, hotels, restaurants and the Boston business community," said Michael Kalafatas, director of admissions at Brandeis University in Waltham. Brandeis has been using Campus Visit since 1995, and Kalafatas wrote one of the articles in the magazine. Kalafatas said because the Boston area has so many colleges, some took it for granted that prospective students knew what the city has to offer.

"Location is a big thing for kids looking at college," Kalafatas said. "This underscores Boston as America's college town."

Working together isn't a new concept for the Hoffmans, who first met while working at the same advertising agency.

"It's better than therapy—more profitable too," Todd Hoffman said.

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To learn more about Campus Visit Inc., call (617) 338-8807 or visit our website at <www.campusvisit.com>.