

Steve Cranford - WHISPER

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Whisper. When someone lowers his or her voice to say something in a whisper, do you want to come closer and learn more? Today we'll meet an executive of an innovative marketing agency named WHISPER. This New York City executive comes from rural Kansas. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Steve Cranford is co-founder of WHISPER. Steve's father was career Navy so Steve moved a lot as a child. His mother is from Arkansas City, Kansas. When his father retired, the family moved to Arkansas City.

Steve finished school there, went to Pittsburg State, and got a law degree at Washburn. He worked as an attorney in Cowley County and then as a special prosecutor for the Kansas Attorney General before being recruited into private industry.

Steve did corporate legal work in Wichita and then founded a business of his own in St. Louis. Through it all, he recognized the importance of one common theme: Communication.

"As a prosecutor, a corporate lawyer and in retail, I saw the value of effective communication," Steve said. He also met and married his wife, a K-State graduate.

In 2004, he and two partners decided to put their communications expertise into practice in a different way. They launched a marketing firm, originally in California and then in downtown New York where it is headquartered today.

They named the company WHISPER. "When we introduced the name, we encountered skepticism from other agencies," Steve said. "They said that a whisper would be drowned out in the loud marketplace of today," he said. "We thought just the opposite. When you whisper, you're sharing valuable information and people are innately prompted to invest their time and listen."

The name proved apt. The goal was to convey messaging that benefits the client. Today, WHISPER works globally in 18 different industries.

"We are a marketing agency that creates reputation-building, brand content, communication and media assets to ensure client causes and products are craved over competing choices," Steve said. He emphasizes assets which add to a company's revenues, rather than costs.

"People think of marketing as an isolated or siloed business function," Steve said. "Nothing could be further from the truth." He talks the language of the business leaders themselves. "We're focused on creating business results, not marketing results," he said. "I'm not interested in the number of click-throughs on a website, I want to add to a client's sales and growth."

WHISPER concentrates on determining the right message first. "We help clients cut through all the noise," Steve said. "We help the client decide what they should say before they spend a nickel to say it, and make sure what they say engages people," he said.

This bottom-line business approach has helped grow the company's clientele. Today, WHISPER clients include NBC Universal, IBM, Accuweather, Mercedes Benz and many more. Much of the company's business is overseas. WHISPER also has clients such as George Washington's Mount Vernon estate and the March of Dimes.

“One thing I’ve learned is how people are much the same world-wide,” Steve said. “For example, when we met with the president of a Saudi Arabian company, the first thing he wanted to tell us about was his family.

“I had no idea, when I was sitting in a classroom at Arkansas City High School, that I would have these kinds of opportunities,” Steve said. Arkansas City is a town of 12,063 people. Now, that’s rural.

As a Kansan, Steve was at first pleasantly surprised at the outside perception of his home state. “Eighteen years ago when we moved to southern California and were asked where we were from, we got the exact opposite of the reaction we expected when we said we were from Kansas,” Steve said. “Instead of stereotyping us as hayseeds, they haloed us as hard-working, dependable, salt-of-the-earth people,” he said. Steve carries his Kansas values and assets with him wherever he goes.

For more information on his agency, see www.WHISPERglobally.com.

We commend Steve Cranford for making a difference with his creative approach to marketing, branding, and adding value to customers. Remember, when you want to be heard: Whisper.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.