

Alan Murphy revitalizes King Research/Barbicide

With a 63-year history, **King Research** is one of the professional beauty field's oldest brands. But up until four years ago, the brand was old and, quite frankly, boring—same skus, same promotions, same advertising. That changed when **Ben King**, whose family created the brand, sold the company in the fall of 2006, and **Alan Murphy** was named president. In a relatively short time, he has revitalized the company and the brand with new products, packaging, promotions and people. **Beauty Industry Report (BIR)** recently sat down with Alan to learn more about the company's transformation.



Alan Murphy,
president

BIR: Alan, please share your story with BIR's readers.

Alan Murphy (AM): It's exciting to share the changes that have taken place at King Research since the acquisition. Over the past four years, we've pumped new life and energy into an old, tired brand by creating a new marketing image; building a team of experienced industry professionals; launching new products based upon "the voice of the customer;" increasing our involvement, visibility and leadership within the industry; and developing educational tools to stress the importance of salon sanitation and disinfection. In the meantime, we've nearly doubled the sales of the company and re-established King Research and **Barbicide** as the global leader in salon sanitation and disinfection.

BIR: What attracted your investment group to purchase King Research?

AM: The biggest driving factor that has allowed us to move so quickly and accomplish so much is exactly what attracted us to purchase the company—its strength and worldwide brand name recognition. We are so pleased with what we've been able to accomplish in a short period of time!

BIR: Give us a brief overview of your first experience when you got involved in the day-to-day business.

AM: My first experience and introduction into the beauty industry was at the 2007

Cosmoprof in Las Vegas. I quickly realized the incredible opportunity we had to take King Research to the next level. At the same time, it became very clear that we needed to implement several internal changes to truly capitalize upon that opportunity.

BIR: What were some of those internal changes and what were the goals in your first year running King Research?

AM: I formulated a strategy around the theme, "Organize and Solidify to Grow." In the first year, we needed to organize our internal processes by building a team of experienced industry professionals and upgrading our systems to gain visibility to every aspect of our business. At the same time, we needed to solidify our business relationships with our existing customers, sales teams and potential new customers. I felt it was very important to personally meet with all of those key stakeholders to listen and learn, as well as to share our strategic vision for the future of King Research. I was confident that if we did the first two things right, the growth would come!

BIR: How did you go about building your team of industry professionals?

AM: In my opinion, the most important role any leader plays is that of recruiter. To be successful, the ability to identify, recruit and retain top talent is a must. My first priority was to find someone with industry experience to handle our day-to-day sales and customer service operations. Through my existing business network and contacts, I identified and recruited **Brenda Leckie** as sales and customer relations manager. Brenda was the perfect candidate! She is a licensed cosmetologist with experience as a stylist, salon manager and salon owner. Brenda was an educator for **Matrix** and, most recently, an account executive for **Aerial**. Brenda added the industry experience and customer perspective we needed. My next focus was in the area of education and technical expertise. I immediately called **Leslie Roste** and asked her to be our director of education and business development. She had worked for me in the past, and I knew she had the right skill set. Leslie has a bachelor's degree in nursing and a master's degree in microbiology. She understands adult learning, is

a great communicator and can deliver education in a way that engages people to have a willingness to learn. Finally, I can't say enough about the rest of the organization behind the scenes, in product research and development, manufacturing, logistics and finance. Every day, the entire King Research team is totally committed to and focused on the success of our customers. I'm truly honored and privileged to be part of and lead such a great team!

BIR: What were your goals when you created your new marketing image, and what steps did you take to accomplish that change?

AM: I wanted our image to reflect today's modern and sophisticated beauty industry. The message we are trying to send is that the next generation of King Research is energized, progressive, stylish, fun and innovative! To do that, we researched and benchmarked the branding and marketing campaigns of other industry leaders, identified best practices and then partnered with a top ad agency to create the image you see today.

BIR: In the past, the product line up from King Research was static. Under your leadership, King Research has been actively launching new products based upon "the voice of the customer." What do you mean by "voice of the customer"?

AM: It's about getting out of the office and in front of our customers to listen and learn. So when I say "voice of the customer," that means our new products are based upon what I hear our customers tell us they need. And by the way, in this particular area, I see our sales teams as customers, as well. A great example would be our new **Dy-Zoff Wipes**. It was our sales team who said our packaging was out of date and didn't have the appearance we needed to be



Dy-Zoff Wipes feature new packaging, thanks to team input.

successful. Another perfect example is our new **Liquid Ship Shape—Professional Surface and Appliance Cleaner**, which was a response to the long-standing issue of hair product residue on appliances (flat irons, etc.). Once it was in the market, the response was overwhelming and led to another customer idea—the **Ship Shape Concentrate Refill** as part of a green initiative they were launching. We immediately went into the lab to formulate the concentrate and packaged the new product in 100% recycled packaging. Start to finish, we completed this project in less than a month.

BIR: Why did you decide to increase your involvement, visibility and leadership within the professional beauty industry?

AM: As the industry leader in salon sanitation and disinfection, I thought it important to step up in support of the industry with our expertise and resources. We are actively involved in support of the **National Institute of State Boards of Cosmetology (NIC)**, **Association of Barber Boards of America (ABBA)**, **American Association of Cosmetology Schools (AACCS)**, **Cosmetology Educators Association (CEA)**, **Independent Salon Business Network (ISBN)** and the **Professional Beauty Association (PBA)**. A great example of the type of support we provide would be the timely and salon specific **HINI Tool Kit** we created and funded last fall for the PBA website. It is through our involvement and visibility with these groups that we maintain our brand recognition and differentiate ourselves as the industry experts.

BIR: Tell me about your educational tools that emphasize the importance of salon sanitation and disinfection.

AM: **Leslie Roste** is responsible for all of our educational programs and industry presentations. The newest addition to our curriculum is the online Barbicide Certification course. Upon successful completion of this free, one-hour course, the participant will have an in-depth knowledge of the importance of salon sanitation and disinfection, as well as the proper usage of all our products.

BIR: Tell me about your background.

AM: Before joining King Research, I was fortunate enough to enjoy a 16-year career within two business units of General Electric in sales, sales management, finance and operations. I started in GE Plastics and then moved to GE Healthcare. In many ways, I'm a

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financially-minded, operationally-focused sales person.

BIR: Alan, what is your vision and corporate mission for the company for the next couple of years?

AM: We will continue to be strategically focused with our customers' success on the forefront of our minds. We will continue our commitment to the industry through education, industry involvement and new product development. Additionally, we will continue to look for acquisitions that complement our current portfolio.

BIR: How do you set Barbicide apart from its competitors?

AM: I have a tremendous amount of respect for most of our competitors. In fact, it is their consistent presence that keeps us focused. We differentiate ourselves by providing quality products with customer service second to none. However, understanding that our competitors can do that, too, we deliver in ways beyond the actual products with education and industry support. No competitor can match the resources we bring to the table beyond the sale!

BIR: How is your sales organization structured?

AM: We utilize independent sales rep organizations: **Gerry Udell Inc.** in the Northeast, **BTB Sales & Marketing** in the Southeast, **CFN Sales & Marketing** in the Midwest and **VNC Sales & Marketing** in the Southwest and West.

BIR: Does exporting play a significant role in your company’s marketing plans?

AM: Our export market is an important part of our business, and it's growing as fast, or faster, than our U.S. market. We have strategic partners in the United Kingdom, Germany, United Arab Emirates, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Israel, Denmark and Iceland, just to name a few. We are truly a globally brand!

BIR: What is the best business advice you ever received, and who was it from?

AM: Doug Parrish, who hired me and was my manager and long-time mentor at GE, said, “The only one thing you have in business that is truly yours is your integrity. Never compromise and give it up for any reason.”

BIR: What inspires you?

AM: The success and happiness of those around me. If, through the decisions I make, I can make a positive difference in the lives of those around me, I'm inspired.

BIR: What would BIR's readers be surprised to learn about your company?

AM: In 2010, King Research will donate more than \$50,000 to various charities nationally and here in our own community. We do everything from sponsoring uniforms for local youth sports teams to nationally sponsoring the **St. Baldrick's Foundation**, the largest source of funding for childhood cancer research in the United States. We are an organization truly committed to giving back to our community!

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