



From BackOffice to center court

The tech company based in Harwich enhances its name-brand recognition sponsoring tennis and golf players, events

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In October, golfer Jonathan Byrd stood at dusk contemplating whether there was enough light left to play just one more hole. He and two other players at the Justin Timberlake Shriners Hospitals for Children Open were locked in a sudden-death playoff and the dark was coming on quickly.

The three, however, agreed to forge on. Byrd swung his club, hit the ball and landed it in the cup, winning the tournament with a hole-in-one.

Sports fans around the country celebrated the feat, and among those cheering loudest were the leaders of BackOffice Associates in South Harwich, one of Byrd's corporate sponsors.

"We get big hits on our website" when a BackOffice sponsored athlete is on television, company CEO Patricia Kennedy said. "You get a lot of exposure on television."

BackOffice develops software that allows companies to create, migrate and manage data in a variety of database systems. Though based on Cape Cod, the company has offices, employees and clients around the globe.

BackOffice spends most of its multimillion-dollar annual marketing budget on more traditional promotions — attending trade shows, working with industry analysts — but perhaps its most visible marketing effort is its sports sponsorship program.

The company's roster includes Byrd, fellow golfers Boo Weekley and Brendon de Jonge, along with tennis players Sam Querrey, Melanie Oudin, Mardy Fish and doubles team Bob and Mike Bryan.

It also sponsors tennis events; last year BackOffice was among the sponsors at the U.S. Open, Bank of the West Classic, Sony Ericsson Open and Serving for a Cure event. The company is also among the sponsors at this year's Sony Ericsson Open, which began Monday in Florida.

Locally, the company backs a Cape Cod Senior Softball League team and the Cape Cod Baseball League's Harwich Mariners.

The professional sponsorships are an essential part of cementing BackOffice's image as a major player in its field, Kennedy said. When corporate leaders make purchasing decisions, they want their colleagues to be familiar with the company they're choosing, she said.

"When they say, 'We're choosing BackOffice,' they want people in the room to say, 'Good choice. We've heard of them.'"

In fact, she said, this kind of marketing program is more or less expected in today's business landscape.

"It's more of a standard now than ever," Kennedy said. "If you're going to do business with the big guys, you've got to act like the big guys."

The company may also benefit by being associated with some of the positive attributes of the sports it is involved with, said Chris Pullig, chairman of the marketing department at Baylor University, which offers a program in sports sponsorships and sales.

"It's a fairly automatic process: Anytime you link things in consumer memory like that, they tend to become attached," he said.

Golf may have associations with competence and classiness, for example. Professional athletes in general may make consumers think of superior performance, he said.

The sponsorship programs also give both existing customers and employees a sense of connection and camaraderie, said John Kelly, BackOffice's vice president of global marketing.

"They call us excited because they see the BackOffice logo," he said. "Customers love it, but employees love it as well."

For the athletes, BackOffice sponsorship means financial support, but also a built-in fan base.

"It's fun to see them there with their support, and see them there in the player suites," Querrey said. "It's just nice to know that I have a big family supporting me."

BackOffice has generally chosen which athletes to support by focusing more on personality than performance, Kennedy said.

"We're looking for great character, someone who's good under stress," she said.

The first time she saw Oudin play, Kennedy was interested in sponsoring her. And when they met, it was immediately apparent that it was a good fit, Oudin said.

"We clicked really well and I was really lucky because it's a great company," Oudin said.

And the company has embraced her, she said.

"I'm like part of the family, which is nice," she said.

Though there is a certain glamor to rubbing elbows with famous athletes and seeing the BackOffice logo on television, what it ultimately comes down to is business, Kennedy said.

"It's very helpful that (potential clients) have heard our name," she said. "We find it to be very beneficial to our growth."

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