

Loving What You Wear and What You Do: Barco Rebrands, Staying True to its Principles



Written by Jackie Rosselli

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In an age where employers seek out only the highly skilled and best educated, the qualities that most attract Barco Uniforms President and CEO Michael Donner are harder to quantify.

"I look for people who like people," he says flatly. "Finding people who like animals or who are passionate about things is easy, but finding heartfelt, high-caliber human beings who value others is more difficult."

Finding the passionate – and cultivating that passion – in employees, customers and life -has served Donner and the 80-year old Barco well. Its ability to see beyond the expected, indeed, to nurture the unexpected, has led to a string of successes and innovation throughout the years. They were the first, for instance, to merge fashion with uniform design, and pioneered the use of nylon in nurses' uniforms back in the '40s, improving both the look and performance of the outfits, while setting the tone in the healthcare apparel industry for years to come.

And now Barco is at it again. Last week, the company announced a retooling of its brand, complete with new logo, tagline, a hip website, and a revamped product line infused with hi-tech fabrications designed to meet the needs of an ever demanding work environment. It's a move, they hope, that will differentiate the company from competitors. But make no mistake: as Barco refreshes its approach, its core principles remain. In fact, they're at the heart of the rebranding initiative.

Take, for example, the new tagline, "Love What You Wear™," a reaffirmation of current corporate culture and past history. "Retailers are looking for products that excite customers, and consumers want something new, something that they'll love wearing," notes Donner.



Of course, they also want value, which in some markets has been code for inexpensive clothing. Barco bristles at the inference. "We have a 'best in class' mentality here," says Kyle Weiner, Executive Vice President and COO. "Consumers want choice and a great experience, and at Barco, we want to have the best product available, no matter the price point."

Love what you wear™

A Technology-Driven Brand

Weiner, a recent addition to the Barco team, knows a thing or two about product positioning, having previously held executive positions with Nike, arguably the most ubiquitous brand on the planet. At Barco, Weiner has helped steer the rebranding efforts, including the launch of arcTechnology™, a platform designed to link Barco with popular performance enhancing fabric technologies that today's customer desires. "We're trying to create a value-added component, to market ourselves as a technology-driven company," explains Weiner. "Customers know about these features, understand them, and in their minds, they add value."

Comprised of four distinct technologies, arcTechnology™ - note that the first three letters come from the Barco moniker - is not proprietary; rather, the term applies to an umbrella of technologies Barco already uses or intends to cultivate. For example, arcFlex™ can be found in the NRG by Barco™ Collection, a new line that incorporates stretch fabrics for ease of movement and a comfortable fit. And arcLux™ is used in the wildly popular Grey's Anatomy™ Professional Wear line, offering nurses a poly/rayon fabric that is ultra-soft and great looking.

"Technology isn't as wide-spread in the medical apparel market as it is in other segments, and we're looking to change that" notes Weiner.

With its strong balance sheet and zero debt, Barco is well positioned to do exactly that. "We're fortunate to have made it through a very treacherous time in the country," notes Donner. While others limp out of the recession with a reduced and battered workforce, Barco actually ramped up its hiring, investing in its future by nabbing top-tier executives who will carry it through the next generation of the apparel industry. It also continued to hand out bonuses, while many abandoned the practice. As a result, morale is at an all time high.

A Greater Sense of Purpose

Then again, it never really waned. Like the products its produces, the relationship between Barco and its employees is derived from passion, commitment and emotion. The word "love" rarely crops up during interviews with corporate types, but it was common practice when speaking with both Donner and Weiner. "We use the word all the time," says Weiner. "I wouldn't be here if not for Michael. He's truly inspirational."

Donner's loyalty to his staff is legend. He frequently helps employees and their families in difficult times, believes in personal and professional growth and enables his teams to learn and take on new challenges. "It makes sense to treat a business as a family; sincerely, authentically," says Donner. "Employees who are respected become engaged and get into your vision, becoming passionate about what they do. This, I believe, ultimately benefits the customer."

Such dedication has not gone unnoticed. When Donner and his wife, Frida, launched the Barco's Nightingales Foundation, established to support the vitality and spirit of nursing through philanthropic efforts, Barco employees donated the equivalent of ten surgeries in Donner's name. "It was in honor of my birthday," he says, truly moved by the gesture.

This sincerity and greater sense of purpose extends beyond the walls of Barco, and Donner believes that without it, the company would have been less successful.

"Over the years I learned that life is a dynamic balance between family, work, physical health, community, and spiritual well being," Donner comments. "At Barco, I've tried to create a culture that supports our employees, partners and customers as they seek to find this balance."

For more information about the Barco brand and its family of products, visit www.barcouniforms.com.

To learn more about the Nightingales Foundation, visit www.barcosnightingales.org.

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