

# Interview With a Consultant

Interview With A Consultant – Chris Bright

A growing trend in the Canadian amateur hockey scene is the increased supplemental ice times that kids today are requiring. The typical winter sport has emerged to be a full calendar activity for many young players. Spring hockey leagues, summer hockey camps, hockey academies and notably, customized hockey programs have filled this demand. As a semi-retired professional hockey player the growing trend of the latter business has drawn intrigue. This report will cover related background information, an interview with a hockey consultant, and will close with some learned essentials of the consulting industry.

## **Background**

After learning of Tucker Hockey via a promotional print advertisement, a cold call was made and a meeting was arranged. The purpose was to discover more about Rex Tucker, a hockey consultant, and the techniques used to promote his consulting business. Mr. Tucker, a member of the National Coaching Certificate Program, was easy to talk with and was more than willing to participate in an interview. Before the interview took place, (October 4th, 2008) there was time to research Tucker Hockey through its informative website. Many items stood out that were directly related to University of Lethbridge's, Management 3901 course. First, the active site immediately grabs the users attention and creates engagement. Secondly, the descriptions of services (hockey and skating schools, day clinics, coaching seminars, customized programs and independent evaluations) were clear and understandable. Finally, there was clear understanding that Mr. Tucker with 15 plus years of teaching hockey was passionate about his work.

## **The Interview**

The interview was set up around busy schedules in a quiet comfortable location and served the process well. There was a natural flow to the conversation and Mr. Tucker was quite open and accessible in answering the following questions.

Chris Bright (CB) "When did you decide to become a hockey consultant and why did it interest you?"

Rex Tucker (RT) " I first set up as a Sole Proprietorship in 1997, registered as a hockey services and consulting business. My love of hockey was always the reason for my involvement and my desire to leave the corporate world also gave me the opportunity to follow one of the things most important to me in my life."

CB "Can you tell me about your initial consulting setup?"

RT "...laughs "Crowded, busy, minimal financing, slowly tested the market. I was living in small quarters and had everything on top of everything. I did my own accounting with Quicken and really wore all of the hats – you have to."

CB "You say that "you first set up as a Sole Proprietorship", has that changed?"

RT "Yes, in 2003 Tucker Hockey (TH) was incorporated."

CB "What went into that decision? Are you happy with the outcomes?"

RT "The business had started to grow at a nice pace and was beginning to look like it was something that I may be able to do for some time. Incorporating gave TH a professional feel and it helped to separate the business from home regarding taxes and liabilities."



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CB "Are there areas in your business background that have allowed you to be successful in the hockey consulting industry?"

RT "After completing my Bachelor of Commerce, I worked in Toronto for Trans Canada Pipe, and then in Calgary in a variety of sales positions. That experience gave me the skill set to do marketing plans, business plans and to create a road map to get through slow periods. The two most important skills that I have compared to many "hockey people" who try to get in to this business, are the cash flow management and marketing plan development. They are essential to my business function."

CB "What about on the hockey side, where have you honed your skills?"

RT "It's funny, I have taken a very unconventional approach to my entry into the business. I did not grow up playing organized hockey and never skated on artificial ice until I was 17 years old but my love for the game was strong and from an early age. When I moved from Toronto to Calgary I immediately tried to become involved with Hockey Canada and from there, built up my resume. You'll notice in my web site I have testimonials from Tom Renney, former National Team coach (currently New York Rangers) and Wally Kozak a prominent Hockey Canada and International coach, both who attest to my passion for the game and love for teaching it."

CB "Thanks, that's a great story. Let's move forward into more of the business functions of the operation. As you know I became aware of your name through some of your marketing at a local arena. It appears like your marketing plays a big role in your business, who is your marketing intended for?"

RT "Our clientele ranges from beginners to coaches to adult recreation players and also hockey associations, so I must appeal to all including the parents who ultimately pay the bills. You'll notice we advertise in print and on our website for all of our programs. We also have a TH newsletter and promotional video that reinforces all of hockey's positives to all ages. I try to keep my marketing below \$10,000 per year but it was definitely that in the early years when I was really promoting the TH name."

CB "Can you elaborate on the newsletter?"

RT "TH puts out quarterly issues of the Hockey Zones and I have a number of contributors who enjoy giving a little back to the game. Parents and hockey people of all levels seem to benefit from it and it helps to brand the TH name. The issues are approximately 4000 words and cover various hockey topics and our programs. It is generally just goodwill."

CB "What about your website. How did it come to life and what aspect does it play in your business?"

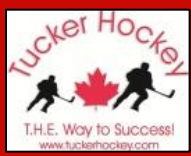
RT "The website has had 4 makeovers since 2002, it is always evolving. It serves TH well with the amount of traffic it gets. It has all of our programs, my philosophies, testimonials, benefits of using my expertise and also our pricing."

CB "With that said how do you set your posted fees? Are they market based or personally set?"

RT "I've been in the game for a while so I understand the Calgary market and the surrounding area. I also know the other power skating programs so they tend to be

personally set. I do not step on the ice now for less than \$150 per hour but that is not where I started. In 1997, they were \$50 per hour and have increased over time."

CB "Where than do you feel you are positioned in the Calgary market? If we are talking about value and benefits, where do your clients see it?"



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RT "I feel like I'm in a niche market, there are parallels between my business and say Audrey Bakewell's or Steve Serdachny's (both high end International specialists) but I don't really worry about my competitors. I feel very connected to my students and love it when a little 7-year-old boy says, "Rex, you are a great coach, thanks". In general, I'm priced in the mid to high range of the market."

CB "What are the keys to selling your services?"

RT "My passion is number one. I also have quality programs and can customize them for any individual or association. My website is important to my business and is a must have today. My best seller is that I have between 70% and 80% of my clients as repeat customers. This drives the business."

CB "Rex, I noticed you also have a Society set up, can you tell me about that?"

RT "Sure, the Kids Hockey Advancement Society was set up as something separate from TH with TH as the main sponsor. We had our first annual golf tournament and silent auction and raised \$10,000 for Kids Sports of Calgary and The Calgary Flames Foundation. It's a nice way to lead in giving back to some less fortunate kids."

CB "That's a nice cause...speaking of social responsibility and the like are there ethical or professional issues in your industry that you need to be cautious or aware of?"

RT "Fortunately, no there have not. Most hockey people are very honest and have the best intentions. From my standpoint, I try to be a citizen and friendly with my clients, it seems to be the best approach. You do need to watch your staff, it is like any other business, except that it is your own so you need to protect it."

CB "Speaking of your staff, are they salaried employees or are they on contract basis?"

RT "They are all contract and are paid for their individual work, my assistant may put 30 hours a week in for me but I know all of the jobs she is doing. The contracting is just simpler on the accounting side." In general, I spend 75% of my time with TH administration and 25% on the ice."

CB "Thanks Rex, just a few more questions. I was wondering if you have any valuable resources that potential consultants in any industry might want to know about?"

RT "Sure, I've read the Tony Robbins material... but the one that influenced me the most is a yearly publication about finding the right career, What Color is Your Parachute."

CB "Thank you, I'll look at those. Finally, do you have any parting tips, for again, consultants in any industry?"

RT "You first need to have some expertise but then you need a lot of drive, entrepreneurial spirit and to be risk tolerant. My life experiences have helped for much of that and my passion for hockey helped for the rest. Second, I make a top ten list every month to prioritize the business. This is based on two words "systematize" and "galvanized", meaning be aware of changing markets and don't get rusty, protect your

business. I also would recommend tapping into a line of credit and to grow your business slowly. Sorry, one more, do not accept failure."

CB "Thanks again Rex, you've given me a great interview, I appreciate your candor."

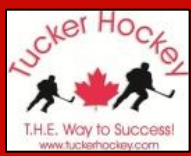
RT "My pleasure, hope I didn't ramble on.".... laughs

### **Perspective & Discovery**

Based on the pre interview research, the interview, and a post clarification phone call, Rex Tucker, with

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pleasure has both sides of his TH consulting business moving in a positive direction. From incorporating to marketing to contracting out Mr. Tucker has learned to take care of the business side of things in order to share his passion and self taught expertise with his clients. There are many general teaching tips that have come from this exercise, below is an invaluable list of the interview's under tone. Be prepared to do multiple business functions to be successful Know what it is and what you are not delivering and to whom Sharing your wealth of knowledge can be a reciprocal business creating act Branding an incorporated business can help create long term achievement Be passionate about what you are doing, it is easier to sell

The interview with Rex Tucker of Tucker Hockey was both insightful and a positive experience. From the cold call through to the short post interview phone call, Mr. Tucker represented himself professionally and true to the characteristics of many consultants, as someone who can be helpful in improving a situation or identifying an opportunity.