Marketing and media: Tyler keeps it in the family

BY DAVID PAGE
THE JOURNAL RECORD

OKLAHOMA CITY — In 1965, Oklahoman native Ralph Tyler started an advertising agency in Oklahoma City.

Over the next few years, he left the advertising agency business, purchased an FM radio station when there were not many FM radios and started an outdoor advertising business to help promote the radio station.

Somehow, it all worked out pretty well.

The radio station – KEBC for Keep Every Body Country – became one of the top country radio stations in the nation before Ralph Tyler sold it in 1986. He primarily focused on the outdoor advertising business until selling Tyler Media to his two sons, Tony Tyler and Ty Tyler, in 1995.

Today Tyler Media, founded by Ralph Tyler in 1966, is still a local and is family owned by Tony and Ty Tyler as 50-50 partners. The 2013 version of Tyler Media includes four television stations, seven radio stations and Tyler Signs and Outdoor Advertising, which has more than 1,400 outdoor advertising displays in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area and Stillwater.

Tony said he did not really plan and prepare himself to lead the company with his brother.

Ty and Tony were both history majors and played basketball at the University of Dallas.

“Tony played and I sat on the bench a lot,” Ty said.

Tony played enough basketball and played well enough to be inducted into the University of Dallas Athletics Hall of Fame in 1998.

After graduating, Tony had a couple of different ideas about what he wanted to do – go to graduate school and coach basketball.

But neither of those endeavors lasted very long.

After a few days of classes he realized he did not want to be in graduate school and his coaching career did not last long either.

“A few semesters into coaching I realized I was not cut out for that,” Tony said. “I did not have enough distance between playing and coaching basketball.”

So in 1995 when Ralph Tyler decided it was time to sell Tyler Media and his two sons took over.

“In 1986 he sold KEBC and focused on Tyler Outdoor Advertising until 1995 when we became of age,” Tony said. “He said he was going to sell the company and he would sell it to us or sell it to someone else.”

The two brothers had a good foundation to work from, Tony said.

“It was such a great company and it had a great staff,” he said.

Tyler Media’s foundation was built with a good bit of ingenuity and some good – including some unplanned – timing.

“When dad acquired the FM radio station in 1972 there were not many FM radios and rock was king,” Tony said.

Most cars of the day had AM radios so Tyler Media started giving away and selling FM radio converters for car radios.

“People would come by the station they would install the converters for them,” Tony said.

The FM station featured country music. It became KEBC and was promoted by the slogan “Keep Every Body Country!”

Keep Every Body Country bumper stickers were distributed and appeared on cars and pickups around the area.

Ralph Tyler also got into the outdoor advertising business as another vehicle to promote the radio station.

More people tuned into KEBC and its country music format as access to FM radios increased and then came a bit of unplanned timing.

“In 1978, Urban Cowboy hit and you talk about luck,” Tony said.

As interest in country music soared, so did the popularity of KEBC and it was rated one of the top country stations in the country before Tyler Media sold the station in 1986.

The company did not get back into radio station ownership until after Ty and Tony purchased Tyler Media in 1995. In 1999, 93.3 FM was purchased.

“It was a classic country station similar to KEBC,” Tony said. “We were able to bring back some of the KEBC talent.”

It now operates as 93.3 JakeFM Oklahoma’s New Country.

Tyler Media also purchased KTUZ television in 1998, which is a Telemundo affiliate, Ty Tyler said.

Other purchases included buying television stations in Oklahoma City and Tulsa in 2004. Both stations – KUOK in Oklahoma City and 25 KUTU in Tulsa – are affiliates of Univision, a Spanish language network.

Tyler Media also owns 106.7 FM, a radio station featuring Spanish music.

The television and radio stations featuring Spanish programming are in a growing market, Ty said.

“There is a lot of growth in the Hispanic market,” he said. “People are coming here with jobs and they have money to spend.”

Today Tyler Media operates seven radio stations with a variety of formats, four television stations and Tyler Signs and Outdoor Advertising, Ty said.

Tyler Media has about 150 employees.

“We are also a partner in Sooner Sports Properties,” he said.

Radio stations 106.7 FM, Magic 104.1 FM KOMG, 92.5 KOMA, Classic rock 1077 KRKO and 93.3 JakeFM have music formats.

News talk is the format for 1520 KOKC.

In April, Tyler Media converted AM 1560 to a comedy radio format. The station features brief stand-up comedy tracks.

And Tyler Media keeps expanding.

In late April, Tyler Outdoor Advertising purchased assets from Mac Signs in Oklahoma City. The purchase included billboards on the Turner Turnpike, H.E. Baily Turnpike and Interstate 44.

“We hope to continue to grow the company if the right opportunities arise,” Tony Tyler said.

And they still get advice from Ralph.

And they both credit their parents – Ralph and their mother, Donna – with giving them a good foundation.

“Mom, with her character building, and Dad, with his work ethic and visionary concepts, have built a sound foundation for us,” Tony said.

“Dad still comes by every day,” Tony said. “This is his hobby. He has been our mentor and sounding board since 1995.”

“He is here at 7 a.m. every morning,” Ty said.
OKLAHOMA CITY – Conflicts often arise in family businesses around issues including succession planning roles for children and even grandchildren.

Planned family forums can often minimize the effects of real or perceived favoritism in a family business, said Alan Campbell, director of Family Business Resources.

“It is a place where family members gather to discuss the needs of the family and the business before conflicts arise,” he said.

Family forums usually meet three or four times a year outside the business environment, said Campbell, a licensed psychologist who has 25 years of experience in individual counseling, family business counseling, sports psychology and marriage therapy.

A family forum session can last from several hours to all day, he said. Family forums can include spouses and older children.

“Sometimes it will be a family retreat that will last for two or three days,” Campbell said. “At family retreats there are usually several issues that need to be discussed.”

Outside facilitators can help family forums succeed.

“Usually there is a facilitator – someone who is in charge of the meeting,” he said. “Someone has to drive the process and usually that is the facilitator.”

The facilitator can set actions that are needed between the scheduled family forums.

Issues discussed at a family forum can include family employment or summer jobs for younger family members.

“Most parents work hard to maintain equality with the family,” he said. “If the truth be known, the fear of not keeping gifts and privileges equal among children keeps family business owners from making important discussions in regard to succession planning. Sometimes, succession planning forces families into favoring one child over the other and this is very uncomfortable.”

Family forums can be used to establish family employment policy, for example having a degree in an appropriate field.

“A French history degree may not qualify someone for a job in the oil and gas family business,” Campbell said.

“Another expectation may be that the family member work outside the family business for three to five years, gaining confidence and bringing outside experience to the family business.”

Through Family Business Resources, Campbell works with professional advisers to family businesses including attorneys, financial advisers and certified public accountants. He started working with family businesses in 1995 through a friendship with a MassMutual agent in Stillwater.

He has a master’s degree in community counseling and a doctorate in counseling psychology from Oklahoma State University.

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