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# Technology@Work: Ruling The Rush

## How The Beekman Boys Leverage Technology To Compete With The Big E-Tailers At The Height Of Holiday Shopping

October 2014

Josh Kilmer-Purcell, an advertising executive, and his partner, Brent Ridge, a physician and former vice president of Healthy Living for Martha Stewart Omnimedia, purchased the historic Beekman 1802 farm in 2007 as a retreat from their hectic New York City lives. But in 2008, the pair lost their jobs within one month of each other. When faced with the possibility of losing the Sharon Springs, New York farm they decided to make it their business.

After a few crash courses in farming from their Upstate New York neighbors, Kilmer-Purcell and Ridge had restored their farm to working order. But rather than falling back on traditional sources of revenue for farms, they began producing and selling soap, cheese, and other artisanal goods using goat's milk from their farm. From selling soap to local residents through a small e-commerce site, the partners have grown Beekman 1802 into a media and lifestyle company with customers around the globe.

Today, Beekman 1802 collaborates with dozens of local artisans to craft a wide variety of products sold online, in their storefront, and through partnerships with major retailers like Anthropologie, Williams-Sonoma, Whole Foods, and Disney. Beyond the e-commerce and the storefront mercantile, the Beekman 1802 brand has inspired a best-selling cookbook and memoir, become a travel destination, and spawned a reality television show—*The Fabulous Beekman Boys* on the Cooking Channel.

For a business based in a town with a population of less than 600 people to become an international business, technology has been essential. Kilmer-Purcell and Ridge have made creative use of the tools available to them to create buzz and gain the attention of discriminating shoppers world-wide. The partners also attribute their growth to the ability to stay in constant contact through e-mail, social platforms, and by phon with their community of customers, no matter where they live.

### Decorating for the Holidays

For Kilmer-Purcell and Ridge, the holiday rush begins the day after Halloween, when the site gets optimized to meet the changing demands of their customers. "Beginning November first, we start programming with holiday ideas, including adding in over 40 new bundles, or collections, of our best-selling products, boxed nicely so that people can ship easily to friends and family, take as host or hostess gifts, or use for corporate clients," says Ridge. "On the day after Thanksgiving, we launch our holiday theme. This year it is 'Christmas at Beekman Place,' which is inspired by Auntie Mame. We try to make holidays colorful, exciting, and entertaining. We want our customers to feel that they get more out of interacting with our website than just their purchases."

### Broadcasting the Holiday Rush

During a busy day at Beekman 1802, the staff will ship hundreds of orders. Eighty percent of their business comes from e-commerce sales. Like most other retailers, the holiday season is their busiest.

Kilmer-Purcell and Ridge think of their customers as a part of their community, so they decided to share the mad pace of their holiday season with them. They developed a very unique and engaging strategy a live-streamed online telethon, which required fast and reliable Internet service, as well as international phone service.

"The number of orders increases dramatically after Thanksgiving, and on the last day of shipping before Christmas we also do a live video-streaming 'telethon' that allows customers to call in and see their order being packed, and going out the door," says Ridge. "We also have special guests drop by to talk to those watching. Last year at our peak, we had over 70,000 watching." Despite all of the bandwidth this project required and the remote location, the partners never had a problem with service. According to Kilmer-Purcell, fast Internet service is vital for small businesses to compete with the large e-tailers.

The strategy garnered a spike in sales and some healthy buzz, so Kilmer-Purcell and Ridge have planned another telethon for this holiday season, with one change more phone lines.

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