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Beat The Odds

Scott Kreisberg, CEO, and
Alicia Kreisberg, chief administrative
officer, One Step Retail Solutions

Here's how husband-and-wife channel
execs Scott and Alicia Kreisberg maintain
double-digit growth — and a happy
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His Vision. Her Execution.

Here's how husband-and-wife channel success execs Scott and Alicia Kreisberg maintain double digit— and a happy marriage.

By Matt Pillar, Chief Editor

The National Federation of Independent Businesses pegs the number of husband-and-wife teams running companies in the U.S. at well over 1.2 million.

Most of these businesses — and even more unfortunately, most of these marriages — are a flash in the pan. According to research from Forbes, just a fraction of husband-and-wife teams achieve success in the form of wealth, and fewer still manage to do so while remaining married.

Husband-and-wife channel executives Scott and Alicia Kreisberg have crushed those odds. Now in its 32nd year, their company, One Step Retail Solutions, boasts a nationwide roster of household brand names that depend on the Kreisbergs and their 50-some employees to furnish their retail technology platforms. Those brands include Asics, the museum shop at the MOMA in Manhattan, New Era Cap Company, and Oakley, to name a few.

We caught up with the Kreisbergs for a discussion on how they've avoided the pitfalls of spousal business partnerships — and how they've built a wildly successful company along the way.



Alicia Kreisberg, chief administrative officer at One Step Retail Solutions, admits that she's sometimes tasked with tempering the enthusiasm of her husband, Scott (CEO), and prioritizing when to launch new products and services.

One Step Retail Solutions

2016 Revenue Growth Rate: 11%

Employees: 50+

2017 Projected Revenue Growth Rate: 29%

Phone: (623) 580-8181

Vertical: Retail

www.onestepretail.com

Vendor partners: Apple, Cayan, HP, Management One, Retail Pro, NCR Counterpoint, Springboard Retail, Teamwork Retail, Toshiba

Distributor partners: BlueStar, Ingram Micro, ScanSource

His Vision, Her Execution

Launched by Scott in 1985, One Step Retail Solutions had already found its legs when Alicia joined the company as a part-time inside sales rep eight years later. She not only excelled in her new capacity, but she also truly enjoyed what she was doing. “I grew to love the retail industry, its people, and the IT channel community,” she says. Her fervor for the job was Scott’s first inkling that his wife could bring more value to the business, and the couple realized retrospectively that her passion for the business is central to their ability to make their partnership work. Alicia quickly transitioned to sales management, learned the ropes of HR and marketing, and worked her way up the corporate ladder to her current chief administrative officer position. Marketing became her primary focus. At times, she acknowledges that her husband’s visionary personality created some tall orders for her marketing department.

Scott acknowledges it, too. “It wasn’t all cookies and ice cream to start,” he says. “In my role as CEO, I live three to five years ahead of the business. That means constantly bringing new technologies, processes, and business innovations to the table.” Right now, for instance, the visionary innovation that consumes Scott is bringing unified commerce solutions into the channel. “The channel can’t be just about POS anymore, and by the same token, e-commerce providers can’t sustain their businesses focused solely on the web,” he says. “The inevitability of the Amazon effect is driving us to guide the vendors and software developers that serve the channel

toward unified retail platforms.” Because so many of One Step’s customers are omni-channel apparel retailers, Scott finds himself in the early stages of exploring body scanning technology as one means to the unified commerce end in apparel. He wants to help his apparel merchants solve the e-commerce size issue that results in a plague of returns and customer dissatisfaction. Left to his own devices, he’d already be marketing a body scanning solution, albeit a not-quite-baked one. Therein lay Alicia’s challenge.

“In the past, I’d already be asking Alicia to take this concept to market,” says Scott. “Today, it’s take a deep breath. Let’s evaluate. Let’s address the privacy and security concerns and monitor demand before we go to market.”

As CAO, it became Alicia’s job to implement Scott’s vision, and when necessary, temper his enthusiasm. “In the early days, if Scott didn’t do a good job articulating a new idea, or if he ignored the HR and marketing constraints to implementing a new idea, it led to some pretty passionate conversations,” says Alicia. “We’ve had to settle on some rules of engagement, and we’ve both matured in our ability to do that.” Those rules of engagement include avoidance of “passionate” discussion in front of employees and acceptance that disagreements about business decisions can’t become personal. “If a law or a budget constraint stands in the way of implementing my vision, I have to accept that and move on,” explains Scott. “I don’t meddle in those aspects of the business that she’s charged with leading.” Instead,

Keeping Company That’s Ahead Of The Curve

Scott Kreisberg knows the value of the company he keeps. He is, after all, married to his CAO and business partner and has been for more than 23 years. Kreisberg is founder of One Step Retail Solutions, and he levels nearly as much consideration on his chosen vendor partners. “When I met Henry Helgeson, founder and CEO at Cayan, we

weren’t necessarily looking for a new payments partner,” Kreisberg says. “It was his explanation of what Cayan was developing in its Genius platform that caught my attention. No one else was even close to aligning a vision like the Genius ‘app store’ model to the payments landscape, but the market was ripe for it.”

Well before Cayan, answering merchant demand for new payment apps was vexing business for OSRS. “We would get calls from customers inquiring about new payment applications like PayPal or Apple Pay, and we’d be sort of hamstrung to offer them,” says Kreisberg. The Genius transaction platform, says Kreisberg, eliminates the need for retailers to subject themselves to a process that he likens to an act of Congress to implement a new payment app. “We can give our merchants the ability to accept Apple Pay

in minutes. That just makes a whole lot of sense.”

Payment applications aside, Kreisberg lauds Cayan’s vision for mobile, too. “In the new retail model, the point of purchase could be anywhere,” he says. With the implementation of EMV threatening to hamper merchants from pursuing mobile POS, Kreisberg says Cayan’s new, EMV (Europay Mastercard Visa)-compliant handheld POS unit fills an important need for mobile-minded merchants.

For her part, Kreisberg’s wife Alicia gives Cayan high marks for its marketing support program, which falls under her auspices. “Cayan is very active with co-op marketing, and we put them to the test on that front,” she says. “We have a very proactive marketing department, and regardless of the ideas we conjure up, they’re always eager to support us.”

www.cayan.com



One Step Retail Solutions continues to leverage the marketing and sales support it's offered from vendor partners like Cayan.

Scott, Alicia, and One Step Chief Operating Officer Brett Stoddard meet for an hour every week for dedicated, level-headed discussions about the trends Scott is chasing. While he confesses that he and Alicia still find themselves in heated discussions from time to time, he says the rules of engagement they've established make it OK for them to compartmentalize those fireworks and end the day with a cordial conversation about what's for dinner.

As they sit down for that dinner, however, there's no attempt to leave work at work. "In the early days, we thought we needed to set boundaries and avoid discussing work outside of the office to protect our time together outside the workday," says Scott. "We quickly realized that this rule just created more stress. The business is central to who we both are. It's natural for conversation about our professional plans and goals to spring up organically, regardless of the setting. Today, we simply let those conversations happen."

The couple is more guarded, however, about letting their passion for the business boil over into time spent with their two sons, 16 and 19. "We make a concerted effort to be sensitive to their needs," says Alicia. "When they need help with homework, or they have a game, or when we're spending time as a family, they're our priority."

Avoiding "Ooh Shiny" Syndrome

Back at the office, Scott's priority is getting out in front of the next big thing in retail — and taking that next big thing to market through the channel. He says his job affords him an opportunity to see and play with lots of shiny objects, but he warns that many of them sound better than they end up being. That's particularly true, he says, when engaging startups. "We've learned that it's risky doing business with startups in the tech industry. Over the years, we've been burned a few times by partnering on projects with startups, only to have their technology fail us, or worse, only to see the startup go out of business."

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Scott Kreisberg, CEO, One Step Retail Solutions



Beyond the aforementioned new solution vetting process, OSRS has learned to take special care to see the execution of newly implemented technology through. Today, the company dedicates full-time labor to the cause. Scott hired Greg Rogers, a project manager whose sole responsibility is to roll out those new tech implementation initiatives that pass muster. "One of the most difficult things for companies to do is to reinvent their products. It's unnatural, and people don't like change." That, he says, is why new product/line card initiatives deserve the attention given them by Rogers. "If new tech makes it all the way to Greg, we simply know it will work," says Scott, whose confidence is rooted in process. Rogers oversees a well-documented, three-to-six-month process of coordinating the marketing, content creation, training, and talent acquisition resources the company needs to execute Scott's vision.

Growth Through Acquisition

One recent example of new tech implementation success at One Step came at the hands of the strategic, self-funded acquisition of a fellow retail solutions reseller. "We'd been hearing for some time about mid-market demand for inventory and open-to-buy management tools," says Scott. He saw an opportunity to fill that void, and his quickest path to market was via the acquisition of JD

Associates, a Boston-based RetailPro VAR that had a successful record selling Management One inventory management software. "This acquisition gave us the instant expertise we needed to offer a complete inventory management solutions set, including an enterprise account manager who's been selling inventory management applications for decades," says Scott. "In this segment of the market, and with software tools as sophisticated as Management One, you have to demonstrate that you're invested in the product. These merchants won't let you sell them something you don't know, understand, or add value to. They'll smell that from miles away."

The acquisition also bolstered One Step's already strong

layer of middle management, an important differentiator that Scott is quick to point out. “Solutions providers in this space are often too dependent on the owner’s leadership,” he says. “If the owner gets hit by a car, the business is doomed.” He says the care his company has taken to build a sustainable business through strong middle management, good technology, and documented processes ensure One Step wouldn’t suffer the same fate. “If I got hit by a car it would suck, no doubt. But, this company would carry on,” he says.

Marketing To The Mid-Tier

Alicia’s particular challenge aligning marketing resources with Scott’s vision for the company’s solutions set not-withstanding, OSRS has faced all of the marketing challenges typical of a POS VAR in its 32-year history. As the company has matured, it’s moved away from the “eat what you kill” marketing mentality of smaller resellers. “We treat marketing like we treat investments,” explains Alicia. “Where a smaller reseller is likely to concentrate its marketing efforts on the niches in which it’s found success, we make a concerted effort to diversify.” That diversification includes social media, email, a healthy dose of direct marketing, webinars, podcasts, video, a proactive referral effort, and taking full advantage of the lead generation and marketing development fund opportunities provided by its vendor partners. Alicia admits that the company has an inherent advantage in its size. “All of our marketing initiatives, with the exception of some occasional campaign work, are managed in-house,” she says. “What we do is very specific, and our sales team is dependent on very qualified leads. That means our marketing messages have to include lots of specifics about our products and services, and we don’t think that kind of specificity can be outsourced.” Neither can campaign management. Alicia says it takes a concerted effort to ensure the various market-facing messaging OSRS produces is cohesive, true to the company’s products and services, and distributed appropriately across marketing channels.

Scott advises that for smaller organizations looking for exposure, outsourced marketing support is a viable option — as is reliance on vendor support. “Many in the vendor community have developed co-marketing programs that support a host of initiatives,” he says. “Those include the provision of content to support outbound messaging, fund-

ing to procure lists, and leads and referrals.” He cautions, however, that those resources will quickly run dry if a vendor loses confidence in a reseller’s ability to execute. “We continue to leverage the support our vendors offer, and they offer it gladly, knowing that we’ll work every lead properly, and the results will follow.”

Well-Positioned For A Changing Market

Asked about the present challenges faced by the retail industry — things like Europay, Mastercard, and Visa implementation and the adoption of mobile POS — Scott

and Alicia are quick to call old news what it is. “These challenges are important, and our customers depend on us to provide solutions in the here-and-now,” says Scott, “but they’re not the future of the channel.” That future, Alicia opines, is decidedly unified commerce. “We need to shift our focus,” she says, “the we referring to the collective channel. “We need to extend well beyond the POS and start focusing on what we can do to help the necessary



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Alicia Kreisberg, CAO, One Step Retail Solutions

reinvention that’s taking place in retail right now.” As traditional brick-and-mortar giants continue shutting stores, Scott and Alicia consider it their place as traditionally brick-and-mortar solutions providers to help chart their paths toward new, sustainable retail models. Those models, says Alicia, require strategies that keep people getting in their cars and going to stores, which obviously has very little to do with the POS. “There’s a great opportunity for us to develop solutions that help merchants engage their customers and create a cohesive customer experience across all retail channels,” she says. The development of those solutions, say the Kreisbergs, begins with the acceptance that as far as their retail experiences are concerned, consumers are in the driver’s seat. It’s up to merchants and their solutions providers to give them a great road. “It’s cross-channel inventory management. It’s the endless aisle concept. It’s RFID that promotes interaction between products and customers. It’s interactive mirrors. It’s pop-up stores. And, of course, it’s the POS and payments,” says Scott. “The future for channel solutions providers is all of this and more.”

And it’s all of that and more that promise to keep Scott and Alicia busy envisioning their future, planning over dinner, and charting their company’s course in the channel for years to come. ●