

**CONFIGURATIONS FOUNDER AND CEO  
RAJIV KAPUR  
BRINGS HIS STORIED LEGACY OF  
'THE ART OF CREATIVE INTEGRATION'  
TO TRADE SHOWS AND CORPORATE ENVIRONMENTS**

By Jonathan Widran

One of the country's leading innovators in the field of experiential branding, Rajiv Kapur, Founder and CEO of the Apopka, Florida-based firm, Configurations, has developed his company into an industry leader over the past 21 years by bringing comprehensive strategic, creative, and tactical thinking together for numerous corporate clients in a unique process he calls "The Art of Creative Integration".

Beyond simply producing powerful immersive experiences in a wide variety of face-to-face marketing venues and helping his customers realize the best ROO (Return on Objectives) and ROI (Return on Investment) in the industry, Kapur strives to create transforming experiences for both his clients and employees.

He shares his years of expertise creating these experiences in his "Improving Results at Trade Shows" chapter in the new book "ROI Marketing Secrets Revealed," in which over 30 of today's top marketing experts share their knowledge with business owners hoping to crack the code and generate revenue beyond their wildest dreams.

Normally when we think of someone leaving a legacy, it's in relation to a famous person or historical significance in the world of the arts, sports, politics or business. But Kapur extends his use of the term to mean anyone—even down to a company's entry level employee -- who strives to make a difference in the world.

"I have a statement that I share with all of those hard working people who have helped make Configurations thrive every day," he says. "I tell them, 'Come to leave a legacy every day.' Some people come to work just as a job or just to make a profit, but I want them to come here to leave a legacy. I want them to approach every one of our clients and every problem that comes up as if they are part of that legacy. We affect every person we come in contact with and can transform them with the way we do business with them. This philosophy can apply to the way our clients approach the internal branding of their businesses as well. Our lives should be about creating legacies, not just about making money. You can leave a legacy every day and every moment is important. The question is, 'What would you want to be remembered as?'"

Kapur's personal answer to that question begins with his successful (and at times, unexpected and happily surprising) evolution from semi-pro tennis player during his college years to successful entrepreneur and founder of two companies, beginning with Visual Resources in the 80s. After being a top-ranked player in his age group in his home country, the Chennai, India native emigrated to the U.S. on a tennis scholarship, attending Anderson Jr. College in South Carolina before transferring to Mercer University in Macon, Georgia and finishing at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton.

While studying marketing and international business, Kapur played as a semi-pro until an injury forced him off a tour and into coaching. He and several pro athletes he knew in South

Florida, including members of the Miami Dolphins, invested in Visual Resources. While still coaching tennis, Kapur decided to check out how things were going with his investment. Realizing the company's need to develop its marketing division, he decided to go to work for it full-time.

Much like Kinko's does today, Visual Resources provided high-end graphics, design, and production services, focusing on high-end presentations for large Fortune 500 corporations, major advertising agencies, and architectural firms. The company came to specialize in mobile marketing and trade show presentations. Observing the way most companies on the trade show floors would use large scale versions of 8"x11" ads they already had to capture people's attention, Kapur had an epiphany.

"I realized that trade shows provided the time and place to attract attention by tapping into people's emotions with key images and words," he says. "I saw that the messaging was in the wrong place, that emotion was where the eyes go, and the movement of people in these venues necessitated a more striking visceral experience than an enlarged print ad could provide. More innovative campaigns were needed for trade shows because of the sensory overload and intense visual competition, and that would involve creative use of textures and different materials. We needed to improve the imagery to create attention in that environment. It was all about communication at the *peripheral* level."

Although the work of Visual Resources began attracting strong attention, Kapur felt the interaction between his clients and their potential customers was not complete. So he founded Configurations, a company that is more strategic in its process of creating programs for clients participating at trade shows. The goal of the new venture was to create strategies that drive creative environments and interactions that produce the desired response—moving a client's target audience from brand awareness to brand adoption by differentiating the company from its competition. Recognizing that the #1 mistake companies make is failing to create a strategy to show how and why they stand out from the pack, Configurations began to teach clients about doing more than simply making claims. As Kapur says, "It's about *being* the difference rather than simply *claiming* the difference."

Over the years, Configurations has worked with top corporate clients in Technology (Fiserv, Convergys, Knowcross Solutions), Agriculture (Sun Belle, Inc. Sunnyridge Farms), Consumer Products (Colomer USA, Johnson & Johnson), Defense/Military (Northrop Grumman, Harris Corporation, AFAMS, U.S. Navy), Healthcare/Pharmaceutical (Stryker, Liberty Medical) and Travel/Tourism (Norwegian Cruise Lines).

In an effort to create an environment that would capitalize more of the use of five senses, the company created its Boothmanship<sup>®</sup> program, which is designed to train even the most seasoned professionals in the art of getting their message across in a few seconds or minutes—rather than the average 45 minutes they have when making a typical sales call. The key is to ascertain a potential client's needs while keeping them intrigued and finding creative ways to draw them into conversation. The program taught the importance of everything from eye contact to engaging opening statements to understanding both the potential client's primary and secondary needs.

The key was making each opening presentation relevant to that individual and, during that conversation, using the exhibit and props to develop a multi-sensory experience connected to that. Those who took the Boothmanship course learned not only how to communicate their company's products but also the intangible aspects of the company and a sense of its corporate culture.

“The overall idea was, ‘I’ll care about you if you care about me,’” says Kapur. “So they were giving off the feeling that not only did they provide a superior product, but also superior service and a budding relationship based on mutual respect. This training resulted in high ROI from day one because of all the newly created opportunities for business that arose from doing more than simply catching someone’s eye with colorful graphics. Our strategies were based on capturing new customers, retaining existing ones, and securing new business from old customers. We work from a five-step process: position, attract, engage, comprehend, and make memorable.”

Another aspect to Configurations’ success in ROI marketing was discovering the value of communicating with potential trade show customers ahead of time and finding out what they would want to talk about before they approached the booth. To find potential attendees, they would make clients look at their database and match names with the trade show’s list of past attendees and new registrants. They were then encouraged to create an A-list and a B-list and market to them. Kapur’s research led him to see that the average attendee comes to a trade show with an agenda, trying to find out what’s new and discover new trends in the marketplace. It was important to show them the suppliers who could best fulfill their needs.

“As we did this, we saw an ability to increase results at trade shows through interaction, and through improved interaction we realized we were communicating a brand promise to the audience we were aiming for,” Kapur says. “We found that pre-show marketing improved results by about 33%.”

Configurations’ follow-up on these interactions — Are they delivering on their promises? Are they making the phones ring? Are they bringing in clients? — quickly ensured them a glimpse into the inner workings of the company. The logical extension of this was internal branding, aka Brand Culture Development, which the company started in 2005. The idea: design interiors for a company’s office space environment to reflect the corporate culture and brand promise — in other words, living it, not just saying it.

As Kapur explains, “It was about creating a work *style* out of a work *space*. If you want to build a good brand, it starts with the people within. It was our response to the questions, ‘How do we make the people inside live that brand promise? How do we put little reminders there that speak to that?’ What we wanted to do is, not only connect the environment to the employees but, help the entire work force connect with each other to create an exciting synergy by immersing people in the culture. A traditional interior designer might make the place nice and beautiful but wouldn’t fashion a reminder of the brand message. Details are important, down to the dominant age demographics of the people that work in a specific department of a company.”

And how does this internal process connect to ROI? Kapur adds: “We have proven that working on the interior of a corporate environment can improve morale of the employees and make the people who work there stay with the company longer. In turn, this results in greater productivity and less expense for training new people because of smaller turnover rates.”

Looking back on his unique journey from being a tennis pro whose career was cut short to becoming one of the country's foremost leaders in the ROI marketing field, Kapur sees a few important connections between these seemingly distinct paths: "We teach our clients that the way to win customers is to get to their hearts, creating a memory that they will recall in their time of need. It's about making those customers dear to their heart. And the heart is about one thing: passion.

"The same passion I brought to tennis when I was younger, I bring to the work I do with Configurations now. Having passion for what you do brings with it the discipline to make it happen, the integrity it takes to stay true to your heart and BE successful, and gives you the unique ability to touch people's lives. When our clients come to Configurations for solutions, they see our passion and recognize that we love what we do. That's the legacy we strive to create every day."