



Highline Partners co-founders Kathryn Orlowski Jones and Brett Posten want their new marketing firm to focus solely on transformative real estate projects. // ADAM VOGLER

Bringing a Narrow Focus to Big Visions

MARKETING STARTUP'S COUNTERINTUITIVE APPROACH: LIMIT ITS CLIENTELE

KANSAS CITY, KS: Brett Posten and Kathryn Orlowski Jones have worked with a vast spectrum of clients in their marketing careers.

Posten, whose credits include a stint with McCann Erickson in New York, has worked on brands ranging from Sam Adams to MasterCard. Jones, who began her career at VML in Kansas City, has helped clients ranging from Honeywell to U.S. Soccer.

But after working together at Dimensional Innovations and taking the entrepreneurial leap last year (on Leap Day, no less), the pair decided to take the counterintuitive step of dramatically limiting their new firm's clientele.

Named after the High Line, a popular linear park created on an old railroad viaduct in Manhattan, N.Y., Highline Partners' sole focus is strategic branding for transformational real estate projects.

"Kathryn and I led the rebranding of Dimensional Innovations, and in that process, we realized that what we loved — transformational real estate — was slightly different than what DI does," Posten said.

So they decided to become partners, just as their parents, Posten's dad, Mike (now with Cushman & Wakefield), and Jones' mom, Deborah Fields of Newmark Grubb Zimmer, had been partners in local real estate brokerage years earlier.

At first blush, the idea of focusing narrowly on transformational real estate seemed far riskier than

what most new marketing firms do: gladly accept whatever paying jobs they can land.

But Posten said "all the credit goes to Kathryn," whose father is a retired sports architect, for making the case for their narrow focus.

"What we realized," Posten said, "was that our personal passions for development, architecture, placemaking and branding put us in a really unique spot. There's so many real estate projects going on just in Kansas City — billions and billions worth — that Kathryn said: 'We have to narrow. We have to focus.' And that has allowed us to find some of the most interesting people. These visionary developers are the people we want to spend time with. We don't care about toothpaste, dog food, veterinary supplies, beer. Sorry beer, but this is so much more exciting."

Jones added: "If we're going to enjoy Mondays as much as we do Fridays, we need to be focused on something we're passionate about, and for us, that's real estate and transformational projects."

Fortunately, she added, "the bar was really low," and no other firm was focused on transformational projects.

The first client Highline Partners landed was BluHawk, a mixed-use project through which Price Brothers is transforming 320 acres in south Overland Park. Other clients include the \$400 million Gateway Sports Village project in Grandview, Jim Stowers III's Oxford on the Blue research park development

in south Kansas City and Rick Worner's One North redevelopment project in North Kansas City.

"There are visionary developers who are trying to do something big and transformational, and there's everybody else," Posten said. "It's most likely that we'll work directly with the developer. If they have a marketing assistant and they're just kind of cranking out fliers, that's really not for us. But if there's a developer who has a vision and really wants to tell that story, Kathryn and I are best when we get to sit face to face with them and help them work through the vision from the earliest stages."

Jones said Highline Partners is able to bring thought leadership to the table through its involvement in organizations such as Urban Land Institute. And although the firm has only two employees, Jones and Posten, it can assemble creative teams that can swarm a project with all the tools in the modern marketing toolbox, Jones said.

"We have connections with graphic designers and people who do 3-D rendering all over the world," Posten said. "We've got videographers, web developers, copy writers, event planners, illustrators, photographers. It allows us to work on a small project or a large project and not feel like we have to feed the beast of agency overhead."

By Rob Roberts — Reporter, Kansas City Business Journal // Oct 26, 2017