

From Lifeguard to Sun King: The Man Behind the Banana Boat Success Story

From Michael Phelps back to Matthew Webb, there have been quite a number of books/biographies written in recent years on modern 'aqualetes' as well as a number of early pioneers of aquatic sports, recreation, water safety and entertainment.

From Lifeguard to Sun King: The Man Behind the Banana Boat Success Story is the remarkable story of Robert Bell, who was not only the man who successfully created the Banana Boat suncare line but also revived the Sea & Ski brand. Both of these product lines were built under Bell's commitment to a number of success principles described in the text.

Did I mention that after building and rebuilding these brands each were sold for over 10 figures a piece!

Brand building, success principles, lots and lots of \$...this is indeed a business book — but not a 'preachy' one.

Robert Bell tells his story of being a lifeguard in Miami Beach in his early to mid teens. While working as a pool boy at hotels such as the Fountainbleu, he was exposed to the number of suncare/tanning products available. This knowledge and firsthand experience would become the basis for his passion and thoroughness in creating the best suncare products on the market all the while building an ever evolving and growing business model.

In 1981, armed with a recent bachelor's degree from Florida International University, 21-year-old Bell took on the reigns of building the Banana Boat brand from its very beginnings. A foundational lesson from a FIU marketing course was a concept known as the "4 Ps": Product, Price, Place and Promotion.

Over the coming years, Bell discovered a 5th P — that being People — as he surrounded himself with a quality team of business players to help develop the Banana Boat brand of suncare products.

With innovative products including the introduction of SPF 23 when the industry standard was 15, about the time back in 1987 when then President Ronald Reagan was diagnosed with skin cancer on his nose, the brand was No. 3 in the USA by the end of the 1980s. A sixth P being Promotions also played a significant role in Banana Boat's growth with product endorsees Christy Fichtner, Miss USA 1986, and Olympic Gold Medal Diver, Greg Louganis also in '87.

After 15 years, Robert Bell sold Banana Boat to Playtex after also being courted by Schering-Plough the parent company of Coppertone the number #1 brand. For the next five years, Bell had success entering the Miami real estate market and enjoying the fruits of his labor. He also became involved with a number of philanthropic causes.

The story of how Bell acquired the Sea & Ski brand is worth buying/reading this book. After obtaining the rights to this vintage brand, he once again set about his P Plans and rebuilt this suncare brand into one worth selling which of course, after five years of "day to day" operations, he did.

After being diagnosed with skin cancer himself in the summer of 2001, though it was 'only' the basal-cell variety and was treated successfully, he came to the simple realization of being careless as a youth in the sun-drenched culture of Miami helped contribute to his potential recurring ailment.

In addition to other skin cancer diagnoses in his own family including an aunt who died of malignant melanoma, Bell is directing his energies in to further educating the 'sun public' by aiming his business a direction he has termed and trademarked: Sun Health. Product development is focused on the 'Sun Pill' (in my words, an SPF vitamin) and a sunscreen product with an SPF 100.