

Kryptonite's PR Maven Donna Tocci Can Not Be Broken

BY JASON NORMAN

CANTON, MA—Not only are Donna Tocci and Henry Winkler both graduates of Boston's Emerson College, but both epitomize cool. Although Tocci is much too modest to admit as such.

"Maintaining composure is easy when you believe in the team you have and the work you are doing," said Tocci, Kryptonite's manager of media and external relations.

Tocci, who said she's closer to the end of her thirties than she'd like to admit, has been at Kryptonite for more than six years. Her main job responsibilities are creating strategies and managing activities designed to build and enhance the company's reputation, brand identity and image.

But maintaining a strong brand image has been challenging at times.

Everyone remembers the blog that blew the lid off bicycle lock security—even those not in the bicycle industry. Stick the non-writing end of a Bic pen into the cylinder-shaped keyhole of a Kryptonite U-Lock and twist. Presto!



Donna Tocci and Chauncey

The lock opens. To be fair, this trick worked on many locks with the same tubular cylinder technology as the U-Lock, but it was Kryptonite and Tocci that felt the most heat.

"My very first thought was not a profound one," recalled Tocci, of the story, which broke in the fall of 2004. "It was simply, 'This is going to be a

long week.' As it turns out, it was a complete understatement."

As a result of that blogger, Kryptonite suffered a \$10 million hit and Tocci did damage control for months, not weeks.

Tocci considers blogging to be a "mixed bag," somewhere between positive and negative. On one hand, it's easier and quicker to defend yourself on a blog as opposed to traditional media outlets, but she admits, "you can't keep up with it all."

"Blogging has absolutely changed my job. I interact with blogs on a daily basis. I collaborate with people that use blogs. I track what people are saying about Kryptonite," she said.

Tocci said she hasn't faced any challenges as a woman in the industry.

"If you think there is a lack of women in the bicycle industry you should try the motorcycle industry. Honestly, I haven't found any challenges just because I'm a woman in either segment of our business," she said. "Action sports is a great industry to be in."

hard to develop products that meet customers' needs. Kryptonite continues to make ongoing advancements in our cylinder technology and we've added more and different elements to our lock testing procedures.

What can we look forward to in the future as far as the bicycle lock goes, and what role will Kryptonite play in this evolution?

Tocci: Kryptonite is, and will continue to be, the leader in the bicycle security category. We are very passionate about our place in this category and take our role as the leader very seriously. Because of that, this fall, at Interbike and Eurobike, 75 percent of the products Kryptonite shows will be new. I'll be a little more busy than usual at the end of the summer. I've seen a few of the new prototype products and, yes, some will look different to the naked eye. However, where we are going to blow people away isn't in the look, it's in the levels of security that will be provided. Remember, the best part of a lock is sometimes the things you don't see.

Tell us about your dog.

Tocci: I was lucky enough to have my Rottweiler, Chauncey, until she was 10 years old. She was an action sports type of dog, going to track and field events, cyclocross events and she made it to the Kryptonite office at times. She was even known to go jet skiing. She's been called the "poster child for Rottweilers" because of her sweet disposition. Unfortunately, dogs don't live forever and not too long ago Chauncey went to doggie heaven.

Having dealt with so many media outlets, what's the strangest question you've ever been asked?

Tocci: I can give you a couple of questions that always make me shake my head for different reasons: "Can you tell me how to break your locks?" "Do I have to give my tubular cylinder lock back? I've used it for 15 years and I don't want to." And, personally, it is always fun to hear this one: "You are a NASCAR fan?"

You're a NASCAR fan?

Tocci: I'm a huge NASCAR fan.

Who's your favorite driver?

Tocci: Jeff Gordon. BRAIN

You had journalists from all kinds of media outlets—not just bicycle publications—contact you for the U-Lock story. How did you maintain your composure through it all?

Tocci: I've worked with *Business Week*, *Time*, the AP, ESPN, *Sports Illustrated*, CNN and a host of others in the past so working with all types of media outlets wasn't new to me. The one thing that I wish more people knew about was the way 25 people came together, day and night, to get a solution as quickly as possible. I had the sense that it was pretty incredible at the time, but looking back on it, it still amazes me what we accomplished in such a short amount of time.

What's the biggest difference between dealing with those major media outlets as opposed to a bicycle publication? Or is there a difference?

Tocci: Working with cycling outlets, general traditional outlets or bloggers is the same. Everyone wants a quote that is all their own and everyone needs the information for a deadline, whether that is self-imposed or by an editor. They want clear, concise facts they can turn into a story that is different than anyone else's.

Was there any internal resistance or stonewalling from within the com-

pany when this story broke? How were you able to take ownership of the problem and rectify the issue in a timely manner?

Tocci: There was no resistance at all from within about solving the issue. None. Unlike some other companies, we didn't try to hide or hope the situation would just go away. We replaced over 380,000 locks worldwide for free regardless of the year they were manufactured or purchased. We simply did the right thing. One of the things that many people don't realize is that we are equally as passionate about our brand as any customer. We take the trust our customers have in our products very seriously. Because of that, when this happened one of the main thoughts we had was, "How do we make this right for our customers?" In the end, we believe we accomplished that.

Kryptonite makes locks for many different uses. What challenges do you face working with the media in so many varied industries?

Tocci: As simple as it sounds, security is security. That doesn't change. It's all about security level, ease of use for the consumer, weather resistance; the same things hold true for cycling, powersports, ski and snowboard and home and jobsite products. For me, personally, it is great to have such a variety of

events and media outlets to work with on a daily basis. The challenge is just finding the same amount of time to devote to each channel.

How would you describe your tactical style in dealing with the media?

Tocci: It's the same with traditional and non-traditional media—honestly, accurately, with total candor and as fast as I can. It's also important to respond to each opportunity for exposure with the same amount of effort and speed, be that a major motion picture, trade publication or a college newspaper. The way I see it, the college journalism student of today is the *Business Week* or *Bicycling* editor of tomorrow.

How has the company bounced back since it took that financial hit in the fall of 2004? What measures or advancements in technology has Kryptonite achieved to make its locks more theft-proof?

Tocci: Kryptonite is bouncing back nicely. An independent agency did a nationwide survey of IBDS recently and Kryptonite still ranked number one in many areas including best value for the money and best products for high theft areas. With cyclists we ranked first in trustworthiness, customer service and highest quality. We are all very proud of these results and continue to work