

## Helping Wal-Mart Get Interactive



### AN INTERVIEW WITH:

### **Kenny Tomlin** **Founder/CEO, Rockfish Interactive** **August 05, 2009**

Rockfish Interactive is a full-service interactive agency with offices in Dallas and northwest Arkansas. Clients include Wal-Mart and various Procter & Gamble brands. In addition to client work, the agency has launched a number of other companies and products, including Silver Joe's Coffee Company, Genofish, CrazyHotJob.com and TidyTweet.

Before founding Rockfish Interactive, Kenny Tomlin launched and managed I-Soft, Inc., an interactive design agency in Dallas, Texas that he sold in 1999. Mr. Tomlin also founded CustomGolf.com.

Mr. Tomlin spoke with eMarketer about the company's work with Wal-Mart and the social media forecast.

eMarketer: Let's talk about Wal-Mart and the Your Zone home furnishing site.

Kenny Tomlin: Your Zone is an example of taking a brand and creating an online brand experience for teens and tweens. Site users can select different room types and design the room to look like theirs, in terms of wall and floor coloring. We created all the 3D models of the Your Zone furniture options. When the room is built to the way users like it, they can actually order everything in that room. It gives them an opportunity to visualize what the furniture looks like and mix and match different options.

There are lots of applications for this type of functionality. There could be opportunities to do this with patio and outdoor furniture or furniture targeted at other age groups. Companies can gain a lot of insight in terms of most popular items and how rooms are being configured, so there really are many purposes beyond just selling the products.

eMarketer: You've also worked on the Elevenmoms program.

Mr. Tomlin: Yes. Wal-Mart was one of the first large brands that really became active in building relationships with moms online. They reached out to eleven moms who were already blogging, Twittering and using social media platforms to talk about the things that were very much on board with what Wal-Mart is about—their "Save money. Live better." brand message. It was very organic.

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Elevenmoms wasn’t about having these bloggers help sell products—it’s really been more about the relationship and the opportunity to build a one-to-one conversation with customers who are passionate about the brand message. A lot of great ideas have come from the moms who are working with us. Now there are over 20 moms in the space.

eMarketer: Any thoughts on the FTC regulating blog content and enforcing that bloggers be more transparent about paid editorial placement?

Mr. Tomlin: If a brand contacts a blogger and says, “I want to send you my product to try,” the brand is thinking of it as an advertising opportunity.

The blogger needs to fully disclose that the product is provided to them for free and then the reader can decide how credible the review is. Because if I received a free car to drive for a month, am I going to write a negative review about it? Maybe I love the car, but a lot of people who read a positive review may be skeptical if the car was provided for free.

Some bloggers do product reviews on their own as a value and a service. What’s been disappointing, from my perspective, is many of these moms are interested in blogging simply because they think they can create a business out of it, but aren’t transparent. If that’s why you’re creating a blog, just disclose it.

eMarketer: Rockfish launched a product called TidyTweet in beta in June. What does it do?

Mr. Tomlin: TidyTweet, like a lot of the products or companies we create, came out of a personal need we experienced. Twitter is a fairly basic tool, which is part of the reason it’s been so successful, but it’s also very easy for spammers to take advantage of.

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With TidyTweet you can create a Twitter account, put in your query and filter out obvious bad words or customize that list. You can auto-reject or auto-accept certain users. You can choose certain languages to turn on and off. You can choose to reject retweets.

Spammers often take the most popular trending topics and append their spam to that, so you can say, “Well look, [if] there’s a message that comes through and meets my criteria and has two or three or four of these popular hashtags, then auto-reject it as spam.” Or you have the option to have that tweet in a queue where you can moderate it before it goes live.

eMarketer: How would it affect TidyTweet if Twitter monetized and offered its own measurement or filtering tools?

Mr. Tomlin: Twitter’s not making money today, but it’s worth a tremendous amount of money. I don’t think Twitter will ever charge brands or companies to filter out spam as TidyTweet was designed to do. I think Twitter’s revenue model would be providing some premium-type services above what they currently offer that you could pay for.

I think most companies using Twitter would pay something for it because they see value in it and many are going to be paying for tools that other companies are building.

eMarketer: What’s next for Rockfish Interactive?

Mr. Tomlin: This year, we’re launching Rockfish Labs. We’re going to begin making investments in other entrepreneurs who have ideas that fit well into who we are as a company—small teams of two or three people who work onsite in our office and have access to our team, expertise and technologies that will allow them to accelerate the launch of a new product or

technology. In exchange for that, Rockfish will have some type of equity and partnership in that business.

We're hiring a development team that will focus 100% on our own products and technologies. Everything we've built previously was built as we focused on work for clients. We'd come in some evenings and weekends to do it.

Now we're going to be more focused on innovating new products and technologies with a building team 100% focused on products and technologies that Rockfish owns and operates.