

by Joanne A. Calitri

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## Santa Barbara Polo Club's Savvy Marketer



Accustomed to a trophy lifestyle, Charles Ward is Sponsor Marketing Director for the Santa Barbara Polo Club

Like so many über-successful entrepreneurs before him – Bill Gates, Steve Jobs and Facebook's 20-something Mark Zuckerberg come immediately to mind – Charles Ward dropped out of college to found his own business. In the three decades since he abandoned

institutional schooling, Charles has become a U.S. luxury-brand marketing and communications industry guru.

Ward began his media and broadcasting career while a journalism student at the University of Texas. He worked at the college radio station,



Working as a team, Charles Ward and VP Katie Turpin keep up with current social media technology

hosting the early Saturday morning show, because, "Who in college," he asks during our interview, "wants to get up and be on the air at six a.m. on a Saturday?" He loved it from the start. From there he got a job at KTBC in Austin and became a TV news anchorman, "...by the time I started my marketing company at the age of twenty-six, I was a minor celebrity in my town, and business flowed in," he notes.

He built Media Communications, a AAAA advertising and marketing agency with annual billings of \$20 million, was the co-founding director of Capitol City Savings, and was on the Board of Directors of the Insurance Corporation of America, a national medical liability body. When he closed his Dallas office in 1984, without knowing what he was going to do next, except retire at the age of 30-something, the next day he was on a flight to San Diego by way of a former client to see if he could help a private concern raise funding for Skipper Dennis Conner and crew in the America's Cup Yacht race. When he arrived at the business meeting, they asked a young Charles how he planned to raise the \$16 million in required sponsorships. "I am not a sailor," he replied, "and neither is ninety-percent of America, but what I know is what Americans love, and that is winning. We are going to get sponsors because we are the *best* and we are going to *win*."

Ward's enthusiasm proved contagious and he went on to attract a number of corporate sponsors (at a minimum of \$1million each) that the yachting industry had never before utilized, including Anheuser-Busch. To close the deal with Anheuser-Busch, for example, Charles offered to put their logo on the keel of the boat. The unveiling of the winning boat's keel – the secret to its success –, which is never unveiled until *after* the race, is an enormous draw.

## Going National

Charles's innovative work changed the marketing strategies of yachting. Bringing the cup to the White House to President Reagan, and arranging a ticker-tape parade in Manhattan, sponsored by Donald Trump, elevated the event to a national media level.

From yachting he returned to Dallas and created Idea Works, a sports marketing company. In 2001 he began marketing for the Las Colinas Polo Club, and it was there he met Pat Nesbitt. "Based on our results in Dallas," Charles recalls, "Pat invited our firm to represent the Santa Barbara Polo Club." He began by bringing in Bombardier Business Aircraft, and later contracted with *Montecito Journal*, which has been the club's media sponsor for over six years. Other luxury brands followed, including Lucchese Boots, Piaget, and Rockefeller Financial. This August, a new auto sponsor will be introduced: Ferrari USA.

Prior to his marketing work, the Santa Barbara Polo Club had no national company contracts. Ward has successfully marketed the naming rights to all the tournaments, and has helped design innovative signage and activation programs, along with the introduction of corporate and media sponsor flags on polo-match days.

For the club's centennial this year, Charles launched the Santa Barbara Polo Club Centennial Minute on KZSB (1290 AM), weekdays at 7:50 am. As a point of respect, he credits his inspiration to return to radio to this reporter, who on his arrival in July talked about his radio days with him at Lucky's.

Successful navigators usually have an indispensable co-pilot, and Ward's partner at the helm is Katie Turpin, who has been with the company for seven years. She is responsible for the look and feel of the tasteful sponsor activation at SBPRC. Katie, with a Marketing and Communications degree from Holy Cross College, had the determination and persistence that Charles was looking for.

As we head into the closing weeks of this year's centennial polo season at the Santa Barbara Polo Club that featured a royal visit by Prince William and his new bride, Kate, we asked Charles what his most rewarding achievement has been:

"Raising the funds and winning the America's Cup from Australia for the United States in 1987 and taking the yachting trophy to the White House," he answers quickly. As for whatever he may leave behind, he ponders and says his legacy may be that he "transformed corporate sports marketing in yacht racing and polo while having a great life." *My*

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