

## RACING INTO THE FUTURE AT REEBOK

It's "back to school" time and Senior Counsel Keith Wexelblatt of Reebok International, Ltd. says the die has been cast on "the big 'wow' sports products" for this year's storm of young customers. That's why Reebok is preparing for autumn 2007 now.

"Our focus is a year out because the lead time from design to delivery can take that long," Wexelblatt notes. He asserts that Reebok is successful because it anticipates consumer demand and develops responsive products to fill a pipeline of coordinated work continually performed by suppliers, manufacturers, shippers, warehouse and distribution specialists, and marketers.

"We use focus groups, technology testing for our products, great marketing and an ability to connect with customers to get ahead," he explains. The result, he says, is "an aspirational brand that makes people feel good that they are getting their best performance from our products."

As Reebok was planning for its 2006 products in late summer 2005, and as its corporate nerve center was jammed with transactional activity, Wexelblatt was called into a closed-door meeting. "On a Wednesday morning, July 27, 2005, [former General Counsel] David Pace asked me what my plans were for the weekend, and I knew something was up because there had been a lot of closed doors and executive travel trips," Wexelblatt recalls.

At that point, he became the sixth Reebok employee to learn that the local titan was the target of a \$3.8 billion buyout bid by German company, "adidas AG." Wexelblatt says he was tapped early because of his working knowledge of "the people, plans and executive benefits critical to the deal." After several 18-hour days and a few "all-nighters" by the lawyers, an agreement was reached and announced to the world.

"It was weird being in meetings with [former CEO] Paul Fireman at 10 p.m. one day, and seeing [our work] as the number one story on CNN, ESPN and local news the next," he recalls. Wexelblatt adds that adidas has wasted no time in "putting integration efforts into full gear," noting that a two-year integration plan was

### FEATURED CLIENT



**Keith  
Wexelblatt**  
*Reebok  
International*

launched just two months after the January 31 closing of the acquisition.

"Some supply chain functions and certain back office functions involved in human resources, legal and other departments can be consolidated," he says. That means more work for the senior counsel, who provides human resources advice for Reebok while managing all litigation other than intellectual property disputes.

But it's not all-work-and-no-play for Wexelblatt, who also wears the hat of Director of Legal Affairs for The Hockey Company, a \$300 million per year Montreal, Canada-based subsidiary that owns popular hockey brands, such as CCM and Koho.

He also recalls settlement meetings with NBA star Sean Kemp in one case and hip-hop artist Pharell in another. "Pharell was wearing thousands of dollars of 'bling' and he had a 350-lb. body guard with a visible [gun holster] and I kept thinking how unique this negotiation was," Wexelblatt quips.

Those kinds of opportunities attracted him to Reebok after several years of litigation, labor and employment work in private practice. "It's a blessing to work in a business you enjoy, and I love that we make sports products and not widgets," says Wexelblatt, a golfer who played tennis and basketball in high school.

He remembers arriving at Reebok and discovering "a difference greater than night and day" between private practice and in-house work. "The in-house world requires you to go deep into the business and the people involved," he asserts. "You only get a deep knowledge of the business from attending years of product meetings, reading catalogs [and] visiting facilities," he adds, noting that he looks to outside counsel for an understanding of the finer points of law and the experience that comes

from dealing with other clients, regulators and judges.

Wexelblatt says he values the experience that Burns & Levinson's Shep Davidson brings to trial-related matters so much that "he has become one of my 'go to' guys" for many kinds of problems. "He gives me the sense that I am his only client in terms of responsiveness, even though I know he is in demand," Wexelblatt adds. "Shep also has a history of success with us, not just in terms of results, but in managing costs," he says.

The "intangibles" are just as important as results and costs to Wexelblatt. "I like it when my outside counsel will drive down to Canton to meet people who are part of the equation," he says. The senior counsel says he also values the "continuity of people on the service team," noting that well-trained associates dedicated to the Reebok team do not have to be repeatedly brought up to speed.

"If I need an injunction or a TRO, I know I'll get it when I need it; I can get a 'yes' or 'no' if that's what I need, or I can get a two-paragraph e-mail or a footnoted multi-state survey if that is what I want," Wexelblatt says in reference to outside counsel who tailor products to client demands.

That kind of outside assistance gives him a little more time for other activities he values, such as his work with the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation ([www.jdrf.org](http://www.jdrf.org)). Wexelblatt was pleased that this year's local gala - where he was honored for his dedication to the cause - helped to raise more than \$1.3 million for research that will help families coping with the disease. Wexelblatt's 7-year old son, Jacob, suffers from diabetes. He and his wife Elizabeth know far too well the challenges of measuring insulin levels (every hour of every day) and the intake of carbohydrates that go along with managing this disease.

Wexelblatt notes that thanks to advances in dealing with diabetes, athletes such as basketball player Adam Morrison, and 10-time Olympic medalist swimmer Gary Hall, Jr. have a more optimistic future. He optimistically expresses hope that promising work with embryonic stem cells will bring a complete bio-genetic cure in the future and Wexelblatt knows that Reebok and adidas will be there with the next big "wow" sports products for those athletes.