

making it happen for you!

# Ken Deckinger

CEO AND CO-FOUNDER HURRYDATE

Ken Deckinger always had a passion for entrepreneurship. As a child, he pretended to be the boss in the make-believe games that he played in his room. As an adolescent, he started a club for the neighborhood kids and elected himself president. As a preteen, he started a comic book company. He made up the stories, drew the illustrations, and had his father run off photocopies of the book that young Deckinger sold to his relatives for 25 cents.

Later at Boston College, Deckinger pursued an MBA degree with a curriculum focused on entrepreneurship. That inspired his first entrepreneurial venture—Kitchen to Go—for college students.

“The business model was to put everything except literally the kitchen sink into a box and sell it to college students,” Deckinger said. “It didn’t work for a number of reasons. At the time the reasons were very painful, but in hindsight they taught me some terrific lessons that I carry forward with me today.”

He then took a job in the software industry in Florida. After only three months, he realized that the job wasn’t right for him, so he quit and moved to New York City.

“I was really trying to find myself and figure out what it was that I was supposed to do,” Deckinger said. “One of the things that entrepreneurs find is that they don’t

necessarily have guidance for their entrepreneurial pursuits. They don’t know what to do. I was that person. I was young. I was idealistic, and I wanted to start a business and change the world.”

This was at the height of the dot.com boom, and Deckinger thought that technology “was the coolest thing in the world.” He jumped in and started a Web-based business for young professionals.

“I had very little idea what I was doing,” Deckinger said. “I was totally caught up in the dot.com world, was having a blast, but didn’t really know how the business was going to make money.”

Deckinger’s next move was folding his Web-based business into another Web-based business, but that combined enterprise tanked four months later. Deckinger then took a job in product development at a software company.

As a sideline, the creative, outgoing Deckinger started throwing parties to help a friend promote a book. “These parties were fun. We’d get about 200 people to attend. I’d make a little money from helping him throw the parties. He was promoting his book. It was great,” Deckinger said.

HurryDate was spawned from those parties.

The first HurryDate party was a sell-out, with 100 people crowding the room. “It was a terrific moment,” Deckinger said.

*(Continued)*

"I was doing what I love. I was at a party, and I was getting paid to do this. It was tremendous!"

That party—and the profits—fed another party, and another, and another. From New York City, HurryDate brought parties to Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and then around the country.

"All of a sudden, I had a business that was working," Deckinger said. "I learned a lot of lessons in my other businesses, and I am making sure to do the right things in this business."

What were some of those lessons?

"Analyze what you're doing and come up with a plan that can be justified before moving forward. Don't do it the other way around," Deckinger said. "Another lesson is build a business that's going to make money. The dot.com era taught me a lot. A third lesson I learned is that you have to do things the right way, not idealistically, and I hadn't always done that."

For Deckinger, doing things the right way included keeping his job until he realized that HurryDate was a viable enterprise, and later seeking an angel investor. Today, HurryDate is a leading brand name in the dating industry, providing more than 150 monthly events for singles throughout 50 cities, an online dating Web site, and a mobile dating application called HurryDate Mobile.

Deckinger is living his entrepreneurial success story. For others who have similar dreams, he advises: "Don't give up. If it's in you, it's in you. You may not be and most likely will not be successful on your first, probably not on your second, nor on your third or fourth tries. Just don't give up. Seek out a mentor or support such as an entrepreneurial course of study that can help you cultivate your entrepreneurial passion. Then go for it." ●

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# Adrian Rand

### INTRAPRENEUR, VICE PRESIDENT OF PRODUCT MANAGEMENT, NAVISITE

Adrian Rand has had five different careers—so far. He's been an intrapreneur in publicly held corporations, including a family-run organization, a start-up entrepreneurial venture that went belly up, and a major corporation.

"Everybody gets excited about the term 'entrepreneur' because it carries a certain cachet and excitement," Rand says. "We all have visions of taking a concept from nothing and growing it to the point that it affords you the lifestyle that you dream of. Lots of money. The big yacht and a place in Florida. For certain individuals, however, I think that being an intrapreneur fits their style more than being an entrepreneur." He defines intrapreneurship as "working for an organization but maintaining the ability and motivation to build the entrepreneurial philosophy from your position within the confines of the corporate hierarchy."

For Rand, that means operating with a different mind-set. "Even though someone else signs my paycheck and as a publicly held company have a number of controls and processes that I must adhere to, I still can focus my thinking around what can I do to improve my area of the company as if it were my own company. That forces me to make better decisions as opposed to thinking that it's someone else's company and someone else's money."

Rand has a different mind-set as well when it comes to the concepts of

success and failure—both of which he's experienced.

"I call it 'learn while you earn,'" Rand says. When faced with a failure or if something did not live up to my own expectations, I ask myself: What did I learn through the experience? Did I grow as a result of it? If I learned something and if I grew personally and professionally, then how can the experience be termed a failure?"

From his successes and failures, Rand has learned to expect a natural ebb and flow. "You're going to have some successes and some failures," he said. "As human beings we all hope for continual success. However, the fact of the matter is that's not life. Life is hard, and as you move down the path the little journeys along the way—both good and bad—are what make you better and stronger. So someone else got the promotion, not you. So you didn't get the job that you really wanted. So what? What will separate you from the pack is your ability to get past the failures, to decide what you want to do next, and then proactively approach the next thing whatever it is."

What is "the next thing" for Rand? He doesn't know—yet. "I'm still not sure what I want to do when I grow up," he said. "I don't know what challenge will be my next opportunity. I know it will be something, and the secret to success is moving, and growing and enjoying where you are rather than wishing you were someplace else." ●

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# Trevor Whiting

### CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER, CORSO'S COOKIES

Trevor Whiting knows exactly how the entrepreneurial cookie crumbles. After earning an undergraduate college degree, Whiting was invited to begin a graphic design business with two partners.

"We did fairly well for about two years, although it was a constant learning process because we didn't know anybody and didn't know a lot about the business," Whiting remembered.

Still, the partnership enjoyed success. The company took on major clients and worked with renowned advertising agencies, allowing the partners to gain valuable experience. One of the clients the partners worked with was a start-up sports apparel company.

"After working with the client for two years on a small scale—and getting paid—we agreed to work with them on a large national print advertising campaign," Whiting said. "It was a large contract and a great opportunity for national exposure. We made a large investment in the project, unaware of their precarious financial situation."

Whiting and his partners soon learned their first painful yet valuable lesson: Taking risks comes with consequences, so take calculated risks.

"We did the work before we were paid. Then they went bankrupt, which created a financial strain on the business," Whiting

said. "We had a difficult decision to make and realized that although we had some successes, there was still so much for us to learn about the industry."

By this time, the trio had cultivated contacts in the industry and realized they could use those contacts to gain the knowledge and experience they needed. "We decided to cut our losses and get out," Whiting said.

For advice about his situation, Whiting called his father, "an entrepreneur who had had his share of failures early in his career and is now an extremely successful business owner." Whiting's father advised him to take three courses of action: (1) Compile a list of things that needed to be done to close the business, then do them, (2) take a week off to rest, relax, and not think about the situation, and (3) take another week off to reflect on the negatives and positives of the situation.

Whiting followed his father's advice. "By then I could look at it objectively," Whiting said. "I could see what I did wrong and what I wouldn't do again, and I also saw what I did right. This was a stepping stone which took me to my next venture."

Using the knowledge and skills in graphic design and business that he had gained in his first venture, Whiting recognized the developing trend of online marketing for companies of all sizes. Whiting's

next venture was a Web design company. He took Web design classes, learned how to do programming, and then began working with someone with experience in Web development.

"I learned the business from the inside out," Whiting said. "We worked with small and mid-sized companies, some of whom were start-ups and others who were well established. I saw such potential in their businesses. Some made a lot of money from the sites we created, and others had great potential but didn't follow through or have the knowledge and commitment it takes."

Soon Whiting became frustrated with the process of marketing Web sites to companies that did not realize the potential of e-commerce and did not know how to harness the power of the sites once they were built.

Whiting kept wondering: "Why do I keep using these skills to build these Web sites for people who just watch them fail?

That's when I started looking for opportunities to partner with other entrepreneurs and to identify a product that I could market myself."

That's when Whiting met me, my wife Tina, and our company Corso's Cookies. He became the third spoke in our wheel. He has built our entire online business within the framework of the original company, and he has been a huge part of our growth since he joined us.

In reflecting on the path his entrepreneurial journey has taken, Whiting observed: "I look back on the experiences with the failed companies as a sort of graduate school for myself. It was on-the-job training, real-world experience, and I'm glad I went through it. I wouldn't trade it for anything. One experience led to the next as stepping stones. Because of all of those experiences, I gained the skills that I needed to make Corso's Cookies a success." ●