Cigar Maker Meets its Match

Tobacco company wedded to line of custom marriage-related smokes.

Custom Tobacco is hearing wedding bells.

The Westwood tobacco company lets shoppers customize the look and taste of their cigars through its online ordering system, but its in-person cigar rolling service has been booming during summer wedding season.

Rachel Mendler, president of Custom Tobacco, said the idea to cater to wedding parties came from its customers.

"We started getting requests for cigar rollings at weddings," she said. "Offering the cigar rolling has definitely been a huge plus."

Clients are able to hire one or two cigar rollers for an hour or up to a full day. Event guests are able to tailor everything from the cigar band to the number of cigars rolled – even the type of tobacco.

Event booking costs can vary greatly, from $200 to more than $1,000, depending on how many cigars are made and how long the staff members are there.

Rachel's brother **Adam Mendler**, a co-founder, said the tobacco is sourced from the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua.

"These are premium cigars," he said. "It's not a cigar that you give out and smile and go home."

Adam launched Custom Tobacco in 2013 with a third Mendler sibling, **Jordan**. The tobacco retailer has offering live cigar rolling since the beginning, but it only started targeting the wedding market last year.

Mendler said the biggest draw for customers is the ability to tailor cigars to their own tastes and needs.

"Our clientele is very mixed," said Adam Mendler. "We do a lot of events and gifts but we also have cigar connoisseurs," he said. "Once they experience our cigars they often come back."

– Subrina Hudson

RINGO H.W. CHIU/LABJ

Stoked: Siblings Rachel and Adam Mendler at Custom Tobacco.

Animation House Drawn to Project

Foray into hybrid live-action series, a first for firm, makes its debut at Comic-Con.

Hollywood animation studio **Titmouse Inc.** is roaring into the big time with an unusual new sitcom.

"Son of Zorn," slated to Fox's Sunday night lineup next month, will be a mix of live action and animation and represents the highest-profile project yet for the 400-employee company.

Formed in 2000 by former "Beavis and Butthead" animator **Chris Prynoski**, Titmouse has previously worked on the "Guitar Hero" video game, Budweiser and Honda commercials, and animated cable TV shows such as "Afro Samurai" and "The Venture Bros."

But this comedy about an animated He-Man-like warrior trying to reconnect with his human ex-wife and teenage son in Orange County is the first network primetime show for Titmouse.

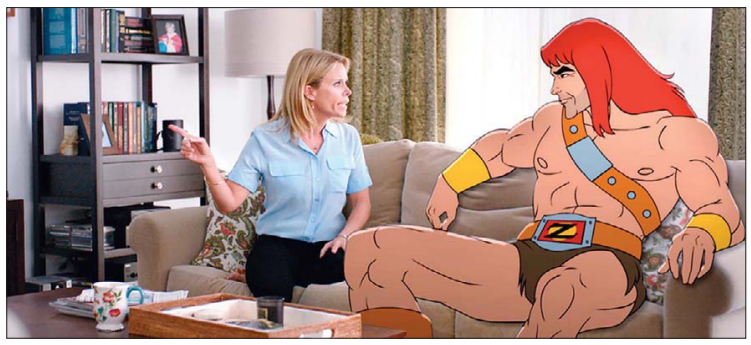
It takes six to eight weeks for the 50 Titmouse employees working on "Son of Zorn" to complete the animation on each episode, which features **Jason Sudeikis** as the voice of Zorn and **Cheryl Hines** as his ex-wife.

"We use digital animation software, give the character different expressions and make sure his eye line matches that of the human actors," said **Jennifer Ray**, a line producer at Titmouse.

The company has offices in New York and Vancouver but the headquarters and majority of employees are in Hollywood where "Son of Zorn" is made.

The show was previewed a week ago at Comic-Con International in San Diego, where **Eric Appel**, the sitcom's executive producer, called it a "unique, bold, and cool show and that's largely thanks to the amazing staff at Titmouse."

– Sandro Monetti



Animated: Hines, left, on set of Titmouse's new show for Fox.

Catch of the Day

Scott Gibson enjoys fishing as a way to bring balance into his fast-paced work life as president of **Gibson International**, a residential real estate firm in Brentwood.

"For me, it's a time to think, it's usually solitude," he said. "Fishing is one of those things that takes a tremendous amount of patience."

But the serenity turned to surprise on a recent fishing trip in Key Largo, Fla. As Gibson, 61, was reeling in a big one, a large hammerhead shark about 20 yards from his boat bolted up and chomped on the fish.

"I ended up bringing a fish head up without the rest of its body," Gibson said. Then, with the confidence of a fisherman who learned the sport when he was six years old, he added, "Sharks can be a challenge. It was not expected … but not uncommon."

That wasn't Gibson's only brush with danger. He also landed on the edge of a hurricane a few years ago near San Diego. "You take a chance when you go out into the open ocean, anything can happen," he said.

Just as Gibson learned fishing from his father, he passed his skills to his three daughters, one of whom, **Hayley**, is a senior marketing director at Gibson. His next task is to teach his grandsons, ages 7 and 10. The fishing lessons often veer into life lessons as well.

"The combination of having to slow down and take your time certainly applies to business life too," he said. "It's good to get that perspective in such a specific way."

Legacy: Gibson and friend.

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JONATHAN DIAMOND

Kicked Around

When a neighbor called **Steven Gitlin**, vice president of Monrovia drone maker **AeroVironment Inc.**, to play soccer 11 years ago, he didn't expect a two-hour jaunt to turn into a lasting passion.

"Once I realized my lungs were still inside my chest cavity, I found myself hooked," he said.

Since then, Gitlin, 49, has spent nearly every Sunday morning playing street soccer with his teammates.

The OMSL team (for Oh My Sore Legs or Old Man Soccer League, depending on the occasion) has seen some serious victories. For more than 10 years, the team has been participating in an annual adult soccer tournament in Las Vegas over Martin Luther King Day weekend.

For Gitlin, playing soccer has become a way to exercise and meet people from different nations and backgrounds.

"The tournament is fun, exhausting, and an excuse to have a great time with my awesome teammates," he said.

Stretched: Gitlin on pitch.

Staff reporters Daina Beth Solomon and Olga Grigoryants contributed to this column. Page 3 is compiled by Editor Jonathan Diamond. He can be reached at jdiamond@labusinessjournal.com.

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