

## THE BOSS

*Have Fun. Start Companies.*

I've always been very entrepreneurial. My first real project was in 1986, when there was a scholarship drive at my high school, John F. Kennedy High School in Bellmore, Long Island. The goal was to raise money for kids who didn't have the means to go to college. The student body was a little apathetic, so I decided to take matters into my own hands to encourage participation.

I collected sponsorship dollars from 20 of the local shops that students frequented, and with the money I designed 1,000 T-shirts branded with a "fun drive" logo on the front. On the back, I listed the participating stores. T-shirts were given to all drive volunteers and people who made a donation. The T-shirts were a huge motivator, and the campaign was successful.

In college at the University of Wisconsin, I took the T-shirt business to the next level and began selling them in the dorms. Soon I opened a retail store right on State Street, the school's main drag. Our school mascot was Bucky the Badger, so I called the store Bucky's. We sold cards, gifts, clothing, anything that college students could use. When I graduated I had three retail stores. At that time, I sold the stores back to my business partner, a local businessman I had met through the Yellow Pages. (This was pre-Google.)

At Wisconsin, I met a fellow student whose father, Mel Marder, was a very successful women's clothing manufacturer. He was my first mentor. With his financial backing we started two clothing lines once I graduated from Wisconsin. The lines were called "Why Work?," a whimsical main-floor men's casual-wear collection and a more cutting-edge young men's line called "Street Buzz."

Mel used to say that you can't always control how fast the orders come in or where the bumps will be in your business, but that you can always control how much money you spend. I learned my first business lesson: Always keep your expenses under control. This lesson has served me well through all my ventures.

As told to Abby Ellin.



KENNY DICHTER

*Founder and C.E.O.,  
Marquis Jet*

**DATE OF BIRTH**

Jan. 16, 1968

**HOMETOWN**

Merrick, N.Y.

**HOBBIES**

Basketball, golf,  
swimming.

**MOTTO**

"We'll figure it out."

I was in the apparel business from age 23 to 28. Then I began to work with my current business partner, Jesse Itzler. Jesse had just written the popular theme song for the New York Knicks — "Go New York Go!" — so we came up with the idea for a business that combined the sports and music spaces. We founded Alphabet City Records in 1996, producing music compilations for professional teams.

We became a national company that worked with all the major leagues. Two years later, in 1998, we were purchased by SFX Entertainment Inc., where I met my second mentor, Robert F. X. Sillerman. Bob taught me my second important business lesson: "Have fun. Make money. Have fun making money."

We received our exposure to private jets through SFX. After five or six flights with the SFX folks, I looked at Jesse and said: "We're in the wrong business. The private-jet business is the future." The convenience,

speed and efficiency of private-jet travel, in my opinion, was something a broader audience would be interested in if it could be made more accessible. So that's what we set out to do.

Starting in 2000, we had five or six meetings with Richard Santulli, founder and chairman of NetJets, who became my third mentor. We wanted to form an exclusive arrangement with NetJets, which sells fractional ownership of aircraft, to sell access to the NetJets fleet via Marquis JetCards. He wanted to know why he should do this and initially needed some convincing. We had to prove ourselves, be persistent. Eventually, he gave us the green light.

While the majority of our clients are successful entrepreneurs and business executives, we have a stronghold in the athlete-and-entertainer world. Our high-profile Jet Card owners include Michael Jordan, Jim Furyk, LeBron James, Matt Damon and Kelly Ripa. We fly all over the world, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Our jet types range from 7- to 18-passenger capacity.

I travel about 250 hours a year now. I say hours because that's how we denominate our flights. I haven't taken a commercial flight since November 2001, when my luggage was lost on a flight from Atlanta to Los Angeles — and I said, "Never again." □