



SNAPSHOT:

Philippe Becker Design

What it does:

Branding and package design.

HQ: San Francisco.

Creative director, co-principal:

Philippe Becker.

President, co-principal:

David Becker.

2007 revenue: \$4 million to \$5 million.

2006 revenue: \$3 million.

2005 revenue: \$2.4 million.

Founded: 1998.

Source of startup capital:

Personal funds.

Employees: 22.

Web site: pbdsf.com

Big revenue comes in small packages for Philippe Becker Design in S.F.

Brothers Philippe and David Becker are proving that two minds are better than one.

The pair brings a balance of creative (Philippe) and business (David) strategy to branding and package design firm Philippe Becker Design, based in San Francisco. The company has landed big-name clients from Whole Foods to T-Mobile to Safeway, propelling it to just under \$5 million last year, about double 2005's numbers.

It's a continuing trend for Philippe Becker Design: The company's 108 percent growth between 2004 and 2006 last fall landed it on the San Francisco Business Times' List of 100 Fastest Growing Private Companies in the Bay Area.

Philippe Becker Design got off the ground a decade ago, when Philippe Becker left creative agency Primo Angeli to strike out on his own. The late '90s saw some upheaval among San Francisco creative agencies, as many of the larger firms sold to national holding companies and conglomerates, Philippe Becker said, noting that company cultures began to change, relationships deteriorated, and employees got laid off.

"It was the right time," he said. "We were able to attract great talent and create a new kind of creative environment." David Becker, who had been working at Frog Design, doing marketing for consumer products, was also ready for a change.

The brothers had "always talked about potentially working together," Philippe Becker said. They kept Philippe Becker Design on a tight budget at the beginning, using personal funds to get the company off the ground and then bootstrapping as they grew. The biggest challenge they faced at a new, small company was getting the attention of major clients: "Getting your foot in the door with big companies when they don't give you the time of day," Philippe Becker said.

But with David's business background --he has an M.B.A. -- and Philippe's creative experience, it didn't take long for well-known companies to sign on. One of the first big wins was Whole Foods. Philippe Becker Design ultimately named, positioned and designed a series of private label brands, including 365 Organic, Authentic Food Artisan and Whole Kids. The work has involved creating more than 300 package designs under those and other Whole Foods brands.

"The work for Whole Foods played a major role in our growth. After that we started working with T-Mobile," Philippe Becker said. "We were growing as we got new clients. If a client was a good fit, it justified building our team."

The company now employs 22, but the Becker brothers try to keep the goals they had when they started Philippe Becker Design in mind.

"We try not to lose sight of our vision and turn into the companies we had left," Philippe Becker said. The brothers also to aim to keep a diverse client mix, both in terms of company size and focus. Philippe Becker Design has done work in personal care products and electronics, for example, though quite a few clients do come from the food and beverage industry. The brothers landed work with Safeway five years ago, and most recently developed the grocer's Organics brand.

As for the future, David Becker said the pair has "strategic goals in mind rather than revenue goals," but steady growth is definitely part of the plan. Still, Philippe Becker said he'd prefer to keep the company under 30 employees. One way the firm builds on its success without having to add employees or grow too quickly is by collaborating with other agencies.

Philippe Becker Design has done some collaborative global work for Hewlett-Packard, for example, serving as "brand counsel," for H-P's Personal Systems Group.

"We play well in the sandbox with others," Philippe Becker said.

