

# Peter Carrillo, '98

## President of Carrillo Holdings, Inc.

*When Peter Carrillo decided to start a gourmet specialty food company in 2007, he drew on his acumen from a decade in investment research and his MBA. For market research, he turned to Chicago Booth marketing students. Guided by faculty in several marketing courses, they produced data that took the launch to a new level.*

### **Making Market Research Part of the Coursework**

I had taken one marketing course, taught by Ann McGill, during my two years at Chicago. Even though I'd been an average student in her course and not focused on marketing, she remembered me from my active class participation. She said, "You should talk to Oleg Urminsky and Suresh Ramanathan," a couple of professors who turned out to be interested in what we were doing and wanted to incorporate our need for market research into their coursework. In a matter of weeks, it went from that idea to a meeting at their offices to drafting a plan for working with student groups. Oleg used it during winter quarter, and Suresh used it in the spring.

### **High-Quality Research, Students with Talent and Passion**

Their energy level was very high. The value you get from students really putting their heart into your project is probably worth \$50,000. They really want to do good work and are willing to go to limits you don't often see in the private sector. For instance, I said, "See if you can find a local gourmet store that will let you set up taste tests with customers." They picked the best sales person of the group, talked a couple stores into doing some samplings, and got really good first-hand feedback on the product. One demo was at a store that sold high-end cooking equipment. Over two hours one evening, they surveyed women who had come there to take a cooking class and who fully analyzed the product from the packaging all the way down to the flavor and texture. They augmented that type of

anecdotal study with larger sample size studies as well. That's the kind of data I was looking for.

### **Their Quantitative Background is Second Nature**

Chicago Booth students joke that they can put a financial edge to anything, and that includes the marketing students. They work with data results and sample sizes, and when you become more knowledgeable at statistics and regression analysis, you become good at figuring out how you get better conclusions without cheating the data. For example, in their study, they used filter questions like, have you bought salsa in the last six months? If someone answered "no," he'd be eliminated from the sample size. Anybody without a quantitative background may not think to do that. But for Chicago Booth students it's second nature.

### **Actionable Results**

One of the things we wanted people to know was that the products were all natural and had no sugar. But all of the students' studies showed no one was really getting that from the label. I moved up the words "all natural" and "no sugar" but subsequent research the next quarter showed that still wasn't working. We increased the size a bit and made the type kind of a shiny gold, which gave it a 3-D effect, and that worked better. That was directly from the students' work. I might not have picked that up for quite a while. And it would be a significant expense to have a marketing firm do this for me. I have truly enjoyed being a part of this experience and have received far more back than I was able to give.

