

WALTER MOSSBERG

This week, iPod meets its most serious challenger so far - Microsoft's Zune.

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BARRY PASTER

Say it ain't so, Coke

The Coca-Cola Co. has been in a funk since its charismatic CEO Robert Goizueta died in 1997. Just before his death, Coke's stock was over \$64 a share. Nine years later, it's near \$47, down 27 percent. Compare that to arch rival, PepsiCo. In 1997, Pepsi's stock was at less than \$38 a share. It's now about \$63.

Much of Coke's malaise stems from the two CEOs who followed Goizueta. Douglas Ivester and Doug Daft, Ivester lacked Goizueta's leadership and vision. And among other missteps, Daft couldn't convince his board to buy Quaker Oats, which made sports drink Gatorade at the time.

Pepsi swooped in, snapped up Quaker and grew Gatorade into a major franchise, just as carbonated beverages were losing favor. Coke's sports drink, Powerade, remains a distant second.

Finally, Coke summoned company veteran Neville Isdell out of retirement to breathe new life into the company. And he's put some fizz back into Coke. The stock is up 18 percent this year.

But Isdell at 63 is getting ready to retire again. His heir apparent is Muhtar Kent, who oversees Coke's international operations. In October, Coke's board was reported to be considering Kent's promotion to chief operating officer, the No. 2 job and a traditional path to CEO at Coke.

But Kent has a problem. Ten years ago, when he was a senior executive at Coca-Cola Amatil Ltd., an Australian bottler, Kent's financial advisor sold 100,000 shares of Kent's Amatil stock short - just before the company issued a profit warning. Shorting a stock is a bet the price will fall. An investigation ensued, and Kent was forced to resign. Subsequently in a civil settlement, he had to return \$324,000 in profits and pay \$30,000 in inquiry costs. He denied doing anything wrong, and labeled the short sale a "bad coincidence."

Neville Isdell was on the Amatil board at the time. He claims to have looked at the incident in detail again before re-hiring Kent last year, dismissing it as a "small mistake."

Kent's defense of the incident may be true, but it's hard to believe. And even if true, he should have known better. He has a degree in economics and a master's degree in administrative sciences. And he was a senior officer at a publicly traded company when the transaction occurred. Ignorance is no defense at that level.

In any event, the day after Coke's board meeting in October, no decision was announced. The expectation was that the board would take up Kent's promotion again later this year.

So it seems the pre-meeting report that the board would consider Kent's possible promotion may have been a trial balloon to see if the market would bless Kent's choice. Public reaction so far has been muted.

Kent may be a good CEO candidate. But Coca-Cola doesn't need a leader with a black mark like Kent's in his past. The company's recovery is just beginning. Why give the market a reason to snuff it? Surely Coke can do better.

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Pop culture boosts

paranormal profession



PAUL BLACKMORE/Cape Cod Times
Ellie Pechet is a licensed mental health counselor, who says she combines her training with psychic ability to help clients. Business has been helped along by the popularity of TV shows like "Medium," which centers on a woman who dreams about dead people and uses her ability to solve crimes.

■ In Buzzards Bay, a psychic counselor says mainstream television shows have been good for her business.

By AARON GOUVEIA
STAFF WRITER

BUZZARDS BAY - Ellie Pechet doesn't need to watch the "Ghost Whisperer" on television. She claims to be one.

The soft music playing in the background meshes with the soothing sound of a trickling waterfall as Pechet, who runs the Phoenix Rising Holistic Healing Center on Main Street, prepares to help an earth-bound spirit move on to "the other side."

Sitting in her office with her eyes closed, she dangles a crystal on a silver chain from her hand and it swings like a pendulum. She tells her client - a local businesswoman who wished to remain anonymous - a male spirit attached itself to her three days ago.

The woman says that's when she began feeling anxious, frustrated and depressed. However, in just minutes Pechet says she has cleared the spirit and leaves her client with a sense of relief.

In addition to earning a master's degree as a licensed mental health counselor from Cambridge College in Cambridge, Pechet

claims she is a psychic and medium who can communicate with earthbound spirits and detail past lives. And business is good, Pechet said, thanks to the paranormal surging into the mainstream. "Medium" and "Ghost Whisperer" are prime-time television shows featuring psychic individuals, who communicate with the dead to solve crimes and complete the deceased's unfinished business.

An Internet search shows roughly a dozen other businesses on Cape Cod specializing in psychic readings, but Pechet claims no one else in the area combines energy work, counseling and mediumship like she does.

There are no special licenses or permits required for this type of business, according to town planning officials.

Whether she's clearing a haunted house

Believe it or not

■ In 2002, a CBS News poll found that 57 percent of the 861 people surveyed believed in psychic phenomena.

■ But the believers were separated along age lines. Poll participants who were 65 or older were much less likely to believe in psychic phenomena. Sixty-two percent of the respondents under 65 said they believed compared with 32 percent over 65.

■ In 1989, when CBS News conducted the same poll, 64 percent of respondents said they believed in psychic phenomena.

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Paranormal: TV shows boost business for mediums

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full of ghosts or extricating a client from a dark spirit, the bottom line is her clients leave a session feeling better both physically and emotionally, Pechet said.

"I realized quickly that traditional counseling is limited," she said. "Although I enjoy it, I wanted to find other ways to help people shift in a positive direction more quickly and effectively."

According to a 2005 Gallup poll, 21 percent of Americans believe living people can communicate with the dead and 37 percent believe in haunted houses.

Pechet said she realized she was a medium eight years ago, but knew she was psychic even before that. She claims her

Benjamin Radford, editor-in-chief of the magazine "Skeptical Inquirer," said it's important to separate common sense and television entertainment.

powers are growing and now she can sometimes gain insight into unsolved accidents.

For instance, she recently spoke with a client who was depressed over the drowning of a family member.

However, Pechet said she was able to communicate with the victim and describe what he was wearing at the time of his death, as well as provide specific details of the drowning.

Hearing what had happened during the accident and being assured the spirit was moving

on to the other side was a relief for her client, she said.

By contacting her spirit guides, Pechet said, she can communicate with the dead and both kinds of spirit attachments - karmic spirits and ghosts with unfinished business.

Karmic spirits have a connection to one of a person's past lives, Pechet said, while ghosts with unfinished business need closure before they can "move on."

While sitting in Pechet's office one day last month, Jeffrey

Hennessy, 43, of Wareham said he has been a client of Pechet's for a year.

When he moved back to this area after a 20-year absence, Hennessy had just lost his job and his father was dying.

After his dad's death, Hennessy said he was depressed and felt a constant weight on his shoulders.

During one of his first visits with Pechet, she told Hennessy she could see and hear his father who was still present in Hennessy's house.

Although he had his doubts, Hennessy became a believer when Pechet told him that his father wanted him to start making omelettes again.

Making omelettes with his father had been a family tradition, he said, and since his dad's death he had been buying ingredients to make omelettes but let-

ting them rot in the refrigerator. He said there was no way Pechet could have known this since they had never met before.

"It took me by surprise but that's when I really started believing in Ellie (Pechet)," Hennessy said. "Now I never second-guess."

But Benjamin Radford, editor-in-chief of the magazine "Skeptical Inquirer," said it's important to separate common sense and television entertainment.

Radford has spent the last 10 years investigating claims of paranormal activity, and specializes in examining supernatural claims from a scientific point of view.

He has received countless reports of supposed psychics and mediums who claim to possess the same abilities as Pechet. While most of these

people aren't being intentionally deceitful, their claims are usually inaccurate, he said.

"For the most part, the people who claim they can speak to spirits really believe they can," Radford said.

There are some hoaxers and liars, but for the most part they're misinterpreting their experiences."

For her part, Pechet said, her client list is growing. Her folder of testimonials is getting thicker.

Interested parties can call Pechet for prices, but she charges \$125 for a basic 50-minute session and \$185 for 75 minutes. Those sessions include readings, counseling and energy work.

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