



EXECUTIVE FOCUS

# An interview with Kerry Tassopoulos, Vice President – Public Affairs, Risk Management and Compliance at Mary Kay Inc.



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S. Kerry Tassopoulos is Vice President – Public Affairs, Risk Management and Compliance at Mary Kay Inc., a Dallas, Texas-based manufacturer and distributor of cosmetics and personal care products. He is involved in every aspect of the company's government relations efforts at the state, federal, and international levels and has led ongoing public affairs work for Mary Kay's operations in the European Union, Russia, and India. He is currently focused on federal legislative and regulatory matters.

Kerry also oversees the company's Risk Management and Knowledge Resources departments. During his 20-year career at Mary Kay, Kerry has provided legal advice on a wide range of issues, from real estate to contracts to various regulatory matters affecting the manufacture, distribution, and marketing of Mary Kay products. In his professional career he has also been Director, Government Affairs for Excel Communications, a direct seller of telecom services, and General Counsel of Jani-King Inc., a franchisor of commercial cleaning businesses.

In addition to his work at Mary Kay, Kerry serves as Vice Chairman of the Direct Selling Education Foundation (DSEF) and is a member of the Government Relations Committees of both the US Direct Selling Association and the Personal Care Products Council (PCPC) and the Regulatory Affairs Committee of the World Federation of Direct Selling Associations (WFDSA). He is a member of the Executive Committee and the Board of Directors of the Public Affairs

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Council, as well as the Board of the Dallas Committee on Foreign Relations, the Dallas Convention and Visitors Bureau, and the Preeclampsia Foundation. He received his B.A. from Emory University in 1979 and his J.D. from the University of Georgia School of Law in 1985. Kerry and his wife Katina live in Dallas and have three adult children.

I interviewed Mr. Tassopoulos in his office at Mary Kay Inc. corporate headquarters in late October 2014. The following is part of our conversation.

*Marc Dollinger: Kerry, please tell us a little about yourself. How did you come to work at Mary Kay? What was your career path when you started out?*

Kerry Tassopoulos: I graduated from law school in 1985. Between college and law school I worked at the Georgia Legislature. Given that experience, I thought when I graduated from law school my career path was to stay in the Atlanta, Georgia, area and work in the legal field—perhaps even to get involved with politics, either as a candidate or working with local or state government. After marrying my wife, however, I moved to Dallas, thinking that it was going to be for a short period of time. Thirty years later I'm still here.

When I moved to Dallas, I had the opportunity to join Jani-King International as their first General Counsel. I enjoyed practicing in-house, and that job subsequently led me to Mary Kay. I joined Mary Kay in 1989 at a time when the company was probably in the \$300–\$400 million range in sales, working as a young staff attorney on regulatory matters. My work encompassed the manufacturing and distribution of our products; so I was working on issues concerning the FDA, the EPA, and various state regulatory bodies, as well as product marketing labeling and import/export issues. This was excellent experience and through it I learned a significant amount about the creation, distribution, and marketing of our products through the direct selling channel.

In 1996 I took advantage of an opportunity to join Excel Communications, a direct seller of telecom services, and create Excel's government relations department. It was a fantastic learning experience and I was with Excel for 5 years. In 2001, the opportunity arose to return to Mary Kay, and I did so. Since that time, I have worked on both the legal side and the government relations/public affairs side. I never thought that I would be working at a cosmetics manufacturer that was involved in direct selling in Dallas, Texas, but it has been a fantastic experience. Reflecting back on my career, I can see

how I ended up here; but that wasn't the game plan 30 years ago.

*I understand. I noticed that many people here at headquarters have worked for this company for a long time. You experienced a little interruption and came back; the company seems to have a hold on people. I've been in a number of meetings with you here and the cast of characters changes all the time. In the scope of your work, you must have a big portfolio. What are the different areas or departments that fall within your purview?*

The public affairs function, which is in the Legal Division, is focused on external government relations activities: advocacy with elected and appointed government officials and other stakeholders. Our team works across the world, with the goal of ensuring that no laws or regulations in any country are enacted which would negatively impact the company, our products, or Mary Kay Independent Beauty Consultants.

I am also responsible for leading the risk management function, which has global responsibility for all insurance-related matters, including an Enterprise Risk Management program. The Risk Management team is a talented, experienced group of professionals who do an excellent job of protecting the company.

In addition, I am responsible for the Knowledge Resources area. The title doesn't really describe the broad range of projects in which the Knowledge Resources team is involved. It basically serves as the company's library, with individual members providing background information. They do a tremendous amount of research. That department is also responsible for a records management function. We did not have a formal records management function until 7 or 8 years ago, when it was created.

The compliance part of my title comes more from the risk management/knowledge resources side, and the public affairs from lobbying, issues tracking/issues management, and the cultivation and development of relationships with third-party stakeholders. Our department also leads the company's efforts with colleges and universities, reaching out to help them understand how the Mary Kay business operates. It is a very diverse portfolio that allows me varied opportunities. The great thing is that our company has grown internationally and this has provided so many new and challenging projects. I get to do different activities and participate in a wide range of projects. As our Chief Legal Officer Nathan Moore often says, our goal within the Legal Division is to protect the dream; that is, to protect

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