

## Life after journalism: It does exist

### As media models morph, former reporters like Scott Weinberger turn skills to entrepreneurship.

By Diane Hess --- July 14, 2010

Two years ago, amid cutbacks at CBS, Scott Weinberger found himself without a job. Rather than accept offers at other networks, the on-air investigative reporter, a three-time Emmy Award winner, struck out on his own.



*Scott Weinberger's media production company has seen revenue double in the past 12 months. Photo by Buck Ennis.*

In 2009, through a startup production company, Mr. Weinberger co-produced *On the Case With Paula Zahn*, a news magazine for the Investigation Discovery network. He drew on his experience co-producing a police reality series, *The Academy*, in 2005 and, before that, working as a sheriff in Broward County, Fla. Now ID's highest-rated series, *Ms. Zahn's* show was recently renewed for two more seasons. Meanwhile, Weinberger Media, which employs 30 people, is producing four other shows for various Discovery channels. Revenue has doubled in the past 12 months.

As traditional media models struggle and audiences look to alternative news sources, more reporters are entering the business world. Many have qualities that make them good entrepreneurs, say experts.

"They're researchers," says Ed Rogoff, director of the Field Center for Entrepreneurship at Baruch College's Zicklin School of Business. "And there is a lot of evidence that people who ask questions and wait for answers are good salespeople."

Reflecting the trend, Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism now requires students to take a seven-week course in business skills. The City University of New York's Graduate School of Journalism runs a joint project with the Field Center to help journalism students create thriving, profitable media ventures.

There is no denying that for professional journalists, the learning curve is steep. Joe Dolce, a former editor-in-chief of *Star Magazine* and *Details*, says he didn't know the price of a stamp when he started a Manhattan public relations firm two years ago.

“Suddenly, I had to order office equipment and learn invoicing and spreadsheets,” says Mr. Dolce.

Networking, however, wasn’t a problem.

“I knew tons of people,” he says. That gave him an edge.

This year, Joe Dolce Communications is on track to double its revenue. Mr. Dolce is preparing to launch a new venture: a local marketing service for independent retailers, called Paper&String.com. For \$2 per day, the service will enable them to advertise limited-time offers on Facebook, Twitter and mobile phones.

“We will work with retailers to say what they need in a specific way,” says Mr. Dolce. “Being an editor is fantastic training for that.”

Jay DeDapper was a TV reporter for two decades, most recently at WNBC, before setting up DeDapper Media, a multimedia production company near Gramercy Park. He, too, thinks his career training helped him get off to a strong start. His firm has generated revenue of \$85,000 in its first six months of operation.

“The refusal to take ‘no’ for an answer that is necessary in journalism is critical as an entrepreneur,” Mr. DeDapper says.

There is a belief “ingrained in the journalism culture that as long as you work hard enough, you can make anything happen,” adds Bill McGowan, who created Clarity Media Group nine years ago after a 22-year TV career.

Mr. McGowan left his job as a producer for 20/20 in 2001 to create a TV production company that also trains people for media appearances, snaring a contract from MSNBC to produce news documentaries. When MSNBC shuttered its documentary unit after Sept. 11, Mr. McGowan suddenly had to turn media training from 15% of his business into 90%.

He tapped his journalism background, “and made the fact that I was a media coach the worst-kept secret,” he says. Today, midtown-based Clarity Media Group has 70 clients. The company charges \$6,000 for a full-day media training session; revenue has quintupled since its inception and has exceeded seven figures. Mr. McGowan expects big growth this year from a new division that coaches people for job interviews.

“I am grateful that I got out of network television when I did, as there were early signs that things were going to get worse,” Mr. McGowan says. “I figured I was halfway through my career, and I didn’t want to turn 50 and be producing the same stories that I’d done for 20 years.”