

CEO Spotlight – Jim Harris, The Wall Street Journal Office Network, New York

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This month, in the CEO Spotlight, we welcome Jim Harris, CEO, The Wall Street Journal Office Network, New York



- 1. You have had an interesting career as a consultant and founder of several companies. It seems that, in particular, you brought a lot of Equity Office Media Network's offerings and experience into what you offer at WSJ Office Network. How did this all come about? Did this help you get into the 780 office buildings that WSJ Office Network is now in?**

After a career in the agency business, brand management and consulting, the true genesis of The Wall Street Journal Office Network came from my experience as one of the founders of a datacom business serving top commercial office buildings. We developed a marketing model that relied upon advertising to tenants in the lobbies of the buildings we were serving, combining the ads with demonstration events in office lobbies. We went across the country launching our service with just those two powerful tactics – and got measurably, fantastic results. From there it was a natural, logical progression to develop an at-work marketing solution that combined a digital network powered by *The Wall Street Journal* – the gold standard in news and information – to deliver value to our affluent, business decision-maker audience, and to our advertisers.

Our experience in the office building-based datacom business, and working with Equity Office, gave our team some of the experience required to deliver such a robust marketing solution. I think it was helpful to our explosive growth – from zero to serving almost 800 US office buildings in about three years – that we had people on our team who had worked for the leading office building company in the country.

2. **WSJ Office Network offers a lot of information and advertising on its screens at one time. My first impression was that they almost seemed too busy. What is the dwell time at your screens, and what do you feel that viewers take away from them?**

We do a lot of research on our service, and continue to tweak it to deliver value, but the results have been enormously strong. Working with top research companies like [Edison Media Research](#), [Arbitron](#), [Brand Keys](#) and [Benenson Strategy Group](#), we know that viewers are spending an average of 3.3 minutes per day looking at our screens, that advertising on the screens is viewed as more powerful and engaging than ads in business magazines, on business-oriented cable television, or any other out-of-home or at-work marketing solution. Viewer research consistently tells us how much our audience looks to and trusts the news they receive on The Wall Street Journal Office Network – and how effective advertising on the network truly is.

And, to your question about product design, I think you are seeing – in real-time – other DOOH providers moving from their legacy appearances toward solutions that look and act like The Wall Street Journal Office Network.

3. **Recently, [The New York Times](#) – which I presume is one of *The Wall Street Journal's* biggest competitors – made a deal to expand with [RMG](#). How does this affect WSJ Office Network's expansion plans? Do you see the two companies encroaching on each other's territory? What do you see as the biggest differences in the two offerings?**

I don't believe the services encroach on each other – and the biggest difference between the two is that RMG's service is mostly coffee shop and casual eatery-based, while The Wall Street Journal Office Network is in office buildings. Both premium brand names – different locations.

Let me add, our partnership with *The Wall Street Journal* is very deep. We work closely with a wide range of teams at [Dow Jones](#), including editorial and sales.

4. **You ran into difficulty a couple of years ago when you tried to expand into elevators. If I'm not mistaken, you can now only keep the screens in elevators that were already up before a lawsuit stopped your expansion in the field, and only until those contracts are completed. Does this limit you to ever going into elevators in other U.S. cities? And, other than being in office lobbies and perhaps company cafeterias, how else can you expand? How many screens to you currently average per building?**

There is all kinds of room for expansion of The Wall Street Journal Office Network. While we settled the lawsuit brought against our elevator service, there are thousands more office buildings that still have the potential to benefit from

our WSJON service. And, of course, there are several other kinds of locations where our service can deliver value for viewers and advertisers.

5. **Talking about expansion, do you have plans to move into other cities beyond that 15 DMAs where WSJO Network is now located? If so, where? With the Stock Market information you offer of interest to investors world-wide, weather information for world travellers, etc., would it be worth your while to consider international expansion?**

While we don't discuss the specifics of expansion, our network grew last year – in a largely horrible economy — and will grow this year as well.

International growth is absolutely on our radar.

6. **Various associations in the U.S. and Canada are trying to build awareness and educate agency media planners and buyers in considering DOOH networks as part of their media plans when the campaign is applicable. I notice that your past experience includes working at advertising agencies. What advice would you give DOOH networks and their sales people to get media buyers and planners to include DOOH more often?**

This is a fabulous question. When I was in the agency business – before the advent of the media agency, we were all one team – and we were always looking for innovation; for better ways to get results for our clients. When I was on the client side, we were constantly challenging our agencies to look for innovations; for better ways to get results. Yet, in many ways today, the client marketing/client procurement/ad agency/media agency dynamic is perhaps more complex, challenging and – dare-I-say -dysfunctional than ever. I don't know anyone in the business who is especially happy with the way things work, and that's not great for our collective success.

My advice is more directed to my friends and colleagues in the agency and client marketing worlds than other DOOH providers:

- Do the hard work necessary to take a zero-based look at every marketing investment. I suspect when you do, you'll find it much easier to re-think a lot of mis-spent dollars.
- Challenge your approach to media spending to work not from the top down, but backward to the customer from the point of the transaction. Study after study backs up a fundamental truth: Advertising and marketing expenditures that move closer to the point of consideration and purchase are more efficient on an ROI basis. And, if we are cold-blooded in our analysis, the vast majority of advertising spending is nowhere near as efficient as it should be.

The Wall Street Journal Office Network influences our audience of affluent consumers/business decision-makers, when and where they are considering and making big ticket purchases – both personally and professionally. Some 65% of all ecommerce transactions take place from at-work computers. We influence this audience as much as if we were at the point of sale!

If you follow this counsel, know that we're here – both at The Wall Street Journal Office Network, and as part of a growing segment of increasingly professionally-managed digital, place-based marketing solution companies – with research and creative solutions that drive results.

There's a reason WSJ Office Network revenues were up more than 100% last year, and are up more than another 100% for the first quarter of this year. We're letting advertisers make their advertising spending more efficient and more effective.

7. I notice a reference on the web to your Smart Media Application. Tell us a little about this and how and where you get the creative for ads on WSJ Office Network.

Our clients are some of the biggest and smartest marketers and their agencies – so the ad buys and creative come from them. Our proprietary Smart Media Apps are a collection of the most innovative ad targeting and serving technologies in our sector. Through our database and ad serving technology, and because we can address each of our screens individually, we can make advertising campaigns work even harder. They include Dynamic Content Insertion, Threshold-Triggered Campaigns, Zone Sponsorships and Geo-Targeted and Geo-Tagged campaigns.

Dynamic Content Insertion allows marketers to insert custom, regularly updated content directly into their campaigns. For example, banks can automatically update the interest rate on their savings accounts as the market changes. With Threshold-Triggered campaigns, a campaign's frequency and rotation can be dictated by specific triggers on the screens based on weather reports, the date, the time of day or stock market activity.

For a current campaign, one national advertiser uses Dynamic Content Insertion to integrate updated college basketball scores into its on-screen ads. Another, a leading technology company, incorporates the latest news headlines into its ads.

One of our early smart media applications was Geo-Targeting, which a major drugstore chain recently used to direct consumers to specific store locations where they could get the H1N1 flu vaccine. The company sold out of the vaccine within a few days of the campaign's launch.

8. Do you think that the reputation of *The Wall Street Journal* helps your network have an easier time to obtain advertising on the network? What is

its strongest selling point beyond that? How much of your advertising is national compared to local?

The Wall Street Journal has become the #1 newspaper in America – and has an audience with spectacular demographics. It enjoys a heritage as the most trusted name in business news and information and has expanded its scope to feature more US and World news, sports, and features than ever. The value of Wall Street Journal Digital Network/WSJ.com is uniquely demonstrated both by the quality of its service and the fact that in a sector where most news is 'given away', more than a million people pay for subscriptions ...so yes, being a *Wall Street Journal* service is justifiably valuable in our advertising sales.

Beyond featuring *WSJ* content, we sell ads because they deliver results for advertisers. Through our locations, our service, and innovations like our Smart Media Apps. we influence a uniquely valuable, hard-to-reach audience when our viewers are considering and making purchases.

Almost all of our advertisers are national in scope, but the ad buys vary between national, local market and building-specific buys. Our advertisers come from almost every category, but primarily financial services, automotive, travel, technology, and telecom sectors. New advertisers have come to us this year in the alcoholic beverage and media/entertainment sectors, among others.

9. **I notice that you play up case histories to help sell. You mention that [Blackberry](#) increased sales 16% using WSJ Office Network. Is that the only media that was used for that particular campaign? What role do case histories play in gaining sales? In your opinion, would that work for most DOOH networks?**

Case studies are essential in selling our media, as they are for any growing media company. As the marketing and advertising world moves to better metrics, being able to quantify the value we add is very important.

To your question about Blackberry, it's a great example of the power of integrating our media with on-site demonstration events. While Blackberry did other advertising and marketing during the period, the analysis conducted by Brand Keys revealed that exposure to ads on WSJON screens and attendance at one of Blackberry's demonstration events in WSJON office buildings generated 8 times the sales results of being exposed to Blackberry marketing in general.

10. **Interactivity with screens via touch or mobile phone seems to be growing by leaps and bounds. How does this fit with your screens now and in the future?**

I don't think there's any question that mobile integration will continue to grow – in every aspect of our lives. Our sector is no exception. The level of immediacy to learn more about a product or service or news story as/after seeing it on-screen is

powerfully enhanced by our personal/mobile systems. As an industry we are just scratching the surface. I'm personally dubious about the close in value of Bluetooth in this country, but the emergence of fabulous text platforms, social media and short URL's, combined with GPS and camera-enabled mobile/smartphones creates a really robust avenue for The Wall Street Journal Office Network's growth – and our sector's growth.

11. You are a big [Scala](#) user and have been for some time. What do you like about Scala and what do you think its biggest challenges are?

Scala has been a great partner, and we've been very happy with its system as a base from which we can innovate. We haven't seen any especially pronounced challenges in their technology.

12. Thinking back over your career, what have your experiences in various companies added to your strengths? What do you feel is your greatest personal strength? Is there any area where you wish you had more knowledge and/or experience?

As a consultant, I always preached focus to my clients, yet my career has less about focus and more a progression through businesses that I've found personally fascinating – and offered a chance to think originally and grow. And, I've learned more at each stop than I ever thought I would.

If I have any strengths, I hope they're vision, leadership and personal integrity. At WSJON, I know we've created a great product – with a long runway for growth — and have people in place to keep propelling our success. I try to bring great people into the organization, set direction, lead change when necessary, and give all WSJONians the freedom (and occasional advice) to do their jobs as well as they possibly can.

I don't think one can ever know enough about finance/deal-making. I came out of Northwestern business school with a great management and marketing degree, but until I got into the world of venture and private equity-backed businesses, I didn't realize how interesting or complex the transactional side of companies truly is. I remember a very successful restaurateur telling me, during business school, that he knew whether his newest place would succeed or fail before it opened based on 'the deal' – location rent, investors, structure. I didn't believe him then. I do now.

13. What advice would you give a young person interested in getting into the DOOH business?

Only choose our sector if you are long on energy, intellect and enthusiasm – and pick the companies you want to work with carefully. (I suspect we will see some failures and further consolidation. Just because screens can be installed almost

anywhere doesn't mean they should.) Pick a place where you can learn and contribute; work for a network that will afford you that opportunity.

While technology will keep changing and improving, don't be seduced by the tech. Stay focused on the end results to key stakeholders. The best networks long-term are focused on delivering results.

14. And what is your own next challenge?

Where do I start!?