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# The Business of the TV Business

A Q&A with Magnetic Production's John Kitchener.

BY STEVEN SCHUSSLER

**AFTER A 12-YEAR RUN** with *Good Company*—KSTP television's then top-rated afternoon talk show—Steve Edelman launched Edelman Productions in 1994 in Minneapolis. A few years later, Edelman Productions moved to San Francisco, eventually expanding to Washington, D.C., and Atlanta. Meanwhile, the Minneapolis office experienced tremendous growth, producing programming for cable networks like HGTV, DIY and the Travel Channel. Edelman Productions was recently acquired by local businessman John Kitchener and is now Magnetic Productions, and their talented team is busier than ever.

**SS: You just bought the Minneapolis office of Edelman Productions. Tell me the story.**

**JK:** I met Steve in 2002, when I joined the company as a producer. When he decided to open up another office in San Francisco, I basically ran the office here for seven years. Eventually I put in a bid for the Minneapolis office, and had aspirations to continue to build the business, but under my company's name, Magnetic Productions. Currently our office is producing a number of series for the Scripps Networks (Food Network, HGTV, Travel Channel).

**SS: What was your biggest sacrifice?**

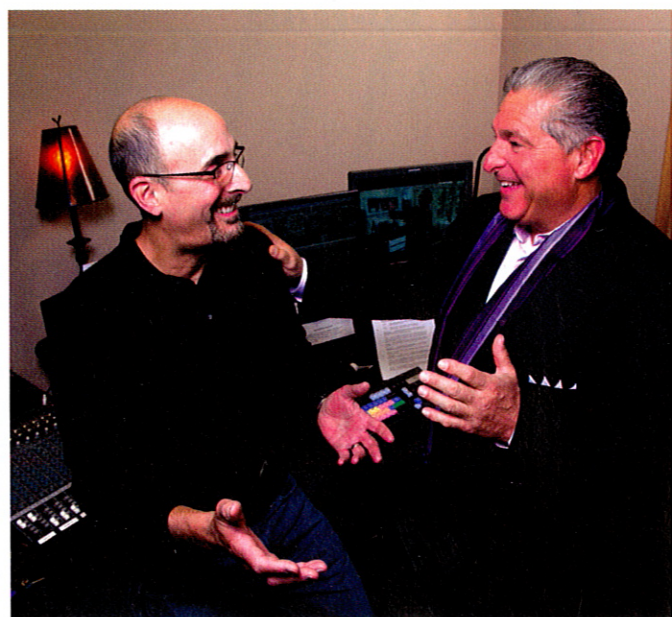
**JK:** I think like a lot of people, being away from family—it's a challenge to find that balance, to run a business, and to carve out quality time with my family. My career has required a lot of travel but I have put a focus on keeping the balance.

**SS: What is your biggest business regret?**

**JK:** When I started out, I was a little haphazard. For years, I was a freelance contractor. I would take whatever work came in the door; and I learned that it's a mistake not to be a little more strategic with the work you take. When you take anything, you have little control, so at a certain point I got wise.

**SS: In building your business what obstacle was the most difficult to overcome? How did you overcome it?**

**JK:** It is a balancing act. The tricky thing is as a young company, you don't want to become dependent on one client, so we are making a concerted effort to reach out to more potential clients. It would be a mistake to get too locked in with just one network and jeopardize the overall picture.



**SS: Who has been your inspiration?** **JK:** Steve Edelman for sure. This business is really built on apprenticeship. You can make big mistakes because the business is complex and creative, yet you can't ignore the business side because the margins are tight. You have to make the right call, and learn how to be effective when juggling the creative aspects with the business aspects. Steve was extraordinarily good at that and I learned a lot from him. Now that I am in charge, hardly a day goes by that I don't think about the experiences I got from Steve.


**SS: What are some words of advice?**

**JK:** At some point you have to take the risk. Beware of the "shiny object syndrome," especially in this business. Be careful not to follow that shiny object; stick with what you do best, that expertise that got you where you are in the first place.

**SS: What drives you?** **JK:** When I was younger I thought I would be an artist, a writer or a famous novelist. In this business, it's the best of both worlds.

**SS: What would you recommend for someone who's trying to pitch you a show?**

**JK:** It's all about the personality and character. Everyone is looking for the next "Dog, The Bounty Hunter" series. We are looking for the next big personalities. It used to be that we just came up with ideas for shows, but without the central character, it's going to be difficult. They want to know that you have a personality or character that is going to carry the series.

**SS: How does someone find that entrepreneurial passion?** **JK:** Make sure you put the time in to learn the business that you want to get into. It truly took me about 20 years to learn the business. There's no shortcut. 

« Steven Schussler (steven@schusslercreative.com) is the founder, chairman and CEO of Schussler Creative, Inc., which specializes in creating, designing and developing theatrical attractions, restaurants, retail stores and entertainment venues worldwide. He is also the author of the upcoming book, *It's a Jungle in There - Inspiring Lessons, Hard-Won Insights, and Other Acts of Entrepreneurial Daring*—To be released in September 2010 by Sterling Publishing.