



Ryan Aloviz

EDITORS' NOTE Ryan Aloviz is a graduate of Indiana University Bloomington. In 2006, fresh out of college, Aloviz started ArkNet Media. Companies under the ArkNet umbrella include Magazine Discount Center (MDC), LensDirect, Birthday Party Booker, and Your Secure Home. He has since been featured in top-tier media outlets including The Wall Street Journal, Fox Business Network, and The New York Observer. Aloviz' success with ArkNet has allowed him to bring the same entrepreneurial energy to his fundraising committee for pediatric cancer, The Silver Lining Society, which he co-founded in 2006.

COMPANY BRIEF Founded in 2006, ArkNet Media (arknetmedia.com), is an interactive agency that operates a portfolio of online companies and also acquires new customers on behalf of brands in a diversity of vertical markets. Their strengths are centered around creating/acquiring companies and producing valuable partnerships by perfecting lead generation, sales conversion, performance tracking/extensive analytics, and traffic leveraging. Together with sister company Ark TeleServices, ArkNet Media has three offices/call centers with over 700 agents and employees in the U.S. and the Caribbean.

What was the inspiration behind the creation of ArkNet Media?

I grew up in an entrepreneurial family – my father opened businesses all over New York. My family is made up of fourth-generation opticians. So it runs in the blood. I grew up standing on shoeboxes at my dad's optical stores or handing out flyers. I was always in love with the idea of building something from nothing.

The birth of ArkNet Media came about in high school and college, when I was always in business and throwing huge parties. I would rent out a 1,000-person room and find a way to fill it up – I did that every summer as a teenager. While my friends were working super hard parking cars, I was making a very comfortable living doing something I actually enjoyed.

Customer Care

An Interview with Ryan Aloviz, Chief Executive Officer and Founder, ArkNet Media

It was about more than the money. I sharpened my skills in leadership and diplomacy in order to get things done. I was dealing with guys that had massive egos, and would have to calm them down when a situation didn't go according to plan or expectations weren't met. I saw that having confidence and being rational could make me, while having an inflated ego could break me. It was humbling, but this was when I began to get a clearer picture of the kind of company I wanted to create. All of those experiences taught me that you can only truly succeed when you give your all and maintain perspective, a profitable lesson to be sure.

Another lesson came about when I started a cleaning company in college, After Party Cleaning, with two of my buddies. It was an incredible disaster. We knew a lot about parties, but we didn't know anything about the cleaning business.

When I graduated, I was still involved in nightlife, loosely promoting parties. I started another company, Dirty Mascot, an incredible college entertainment Web site where I hired photographers from all over the country to hit up bars and lounges. We had a DJ, a gossip blogger, everything. It was done with no VC money, since I was able to spend a lot of the money I had earned in nightlife.

It was another epic disaster. My Achilles' heel was my tendency to say yes to so much so fast. Suddenly, I was a college graduate, still working in nightlife, with the drive to do more. I watched as my friends moved on to bigger and better things, and I knew it was time to do the same. I'm competitive by nature, and everyone was moving forward while I had hit a wall. I would continue trying to innovate in the Manhattan nightlife industry, even as a totally different opportunity presented itself.

My father called me and said, I have a URL called Magazine Super Center and a friend who works at Time Inc., which owned Synapse. He asked if I wanted to come to Long Island and work something out. At that time, I knew only a little about e-commerce. I was excited to try something new, but I was equally as nervous.

I started Magazine Super Center with close to zero dollars since I was only given enough money to buy sneakers to walk to the office. Soon after, I changed the name to Magazine Discount Center and hired a developer overseas. I also hired a few guys whose work impressed me, people I knew that could help me overcome the challenges of entrepreneurship.

People in business often blame their respective industries when the money isn't coming in. As I learned, however, sometimes it's you and sometimes it's your business model.

The magazine business as a whole peaks in the fourth quarter – it's a holiday stampede. We were at 2008 going into 2009 – two years being in this business – and things were terrible. The beauty of e-commerce, however, is that even small tweaks can make a big difference. At the end of 2009, I went from doing almost no business to doing \$20,000 a day in sales – it was amazing.

Slowly but surely, with the success of Magazine Discount Center, I was able to acquire a contact lens company called LensDirect. We're working hard to turn that 20-year old brand into a global optical store. All the while, I was building up my NYC-based event planning company, Birthday Party Booker, which we're taking nationwide. This has all been with no VC. I know a lot of young guys are hesitant to get into business because they think they need VC. I'm living proof that you don't.

Do you anticipate continued growth in print?

I do. 2012 was a year where things began to look less bleak because the industry is finally getting smarter with digital. Print is in an awkward transition phase and publishers who are willing to explore new models will come out on top. We are starting to see how digital publishing complements print, but can't totally replace it.

How do you differentiate your businesses? Does it come down to price or service?

Price is obviously a factor, but we can't rely solely on having the lowest price out there. We pride ourselves on transparency in communication. As a customer service-driven company, we must ensure that our customers remain loyal. What separates us from everyone else is that we work hard to gain consumer trust and maintain those relationships.

Do you believe that you can teach entrepreneurship or do you have to be born with it?

You can teach aspects of it, but some people are naturally talented entrepreneurs. An outgoing personality goes a long way, although I have seen really successful people that have no charisma. Ultimately, it's about pursuing what you love and believe in. ●