

What makes Ari Benowitz A Visionary?

By Susan Sherbert

**BUSINESS
SPOTLIGHT**



Businesses don't happen out of nowhere. They start with a person and an idea. But how do you turn that spark into success? And why do some crazy ideas take off like wild fire while other great ideas fail miserably? These are all questions in my mind when I sat down to speak with Ari Benowitz.

Ari began his business career at a time when visionaries were abundant. The internet was a growing technology and everyone had ideas on how to harness its power. Ari started his career by supplying bandwidth to companies that wanted video and audio content for their websites. He cared for his customers and truly wanted to help them, however when the lay-offs and mergers came during the dot com bust, good customer service became an increasingly difficult task. So in 2000 Ari learned from the failures of others and started BandCon, a company that provided high-quality affordable bandwidth.

BandCon may have started out of his garage, but Ari grew the company to \$20 million before he sold it in 2010. During our interview I discovered that one of his clients was My Space, and that lead to a very interesting discussion about visionaries. We talked

about the qualities or traits it takes to turn a dream into a success, and looked at why some of the really great ideas failed. Ari described a whole list of dot com companies that didn't make it and the most common reason seemed to be poor business skills. "When a company value is way above future earning potential there is bound to be trouble no matter how good the idea is." Ari said, "If it doesn't make sense, it does not make sense." In other words, a good idea must have a plan in place before the idea makes sense. If you don't have a plan – all you have is a dream, not a vision.

It became clear that a good business instinct is a necessary trait of a visionary, however many visionaries are creative thinkers. In order to move the dream forward, true visionaries often partner with people who have the skills they lack. For example, Walt Disney was the visionary, but it was his brother Roy Disney that had the business skills. It takes both the creative vision and the financial logic to turn an idea into a successful enterprise.

Ari Benefits does not see himself as visionary. He is more of a left-brain thinker. Selling computer services, even with superior customer service, is not going to change the world. Yet Ari is a visionary because visionaries don't have to change the entire world – they just

have to improve a little part of the world. And that is exactly what Ari plans to do with his new company BlackStone Network.

As I watched Ari explain his vision for BlackStone Network to a room full of vendors and business partners, I saw another few traits of a visionary: Good people skills, the ability to "sell" your idea, and a passion or energy for success. Yeah, okay, BlackStone Network is an IT Solutions Consultant for small to medium sized businesses, but as Ari described the vision for the company, you couldn't resist wanting to be a part of the success. He mentioned the talented staff they had put together and acknowledged the vendors they would be working with. He showed a genuine concern for everyone involved, and if you had IT problems, needed computer equipment, or just had a simple question, you know BlackStone Network will be there to help. Heck, even if you didn't need their services, you felt like you wanted to go out of your way to find some people that do. He is that good.

Ari Benowitz is a true visionary partly because of his idea and his passion, but more importantly, because he has a plan - not just a dream. ■