



TECH STAR



Mark Sigal: Pushing the Internet to New Heights

[By Akbar Ali]

Mark Sigal is a co-founder and the CEO of vSocial.com, a video-clip-sharing website that enables individuals and organizations to connect with others via video clips posted online. Sigal has a genuine flair and passion for what he does—bringing people together via the Internet. He said, “I have always believed that if you are passionate about what you do and are committed to being the best at it, the cream will always rise to the top.”

Sigal traces the beginnings of his career in technology back to 1993, when he was running a commercial real estate company called CBM. At the time, technology was only a hobby of his, and he confessed that his first PC was a RadioShack TRS-80 (remember those?), which long preceded the advent of the web, dotcoms, and broadband. Motivated by general interest, he picked up a copy of an early tech-oriented publication known as *Mondo 2000*. This quickly got him participating in what were, back then, known as bulletin board systems, an early form of what is now known as an “online community.”

It wasn’t long before Sigal had signed up with AOL. Soon, he realized that “the Internet was the greatest and most exciting opportunity of the next 20 years.” He regularly found himself talking with real estate clients about how revolutionary the Internet was about to become and thus decided to take the plunge out of real estate and into the technology industry. He said, “I literally went from running a company with three offices and 1.5 million square feet of real estate to taking an inside sales position and starting at the bottom within tech.” But stay at the bottom he wouldn’t do for long: within two years he had founded his own technology company, Rapid Logic, which he then sold four years later for the cool sum of \$67 million.

Sigal graduated from UCLA in 1988 with a degree in psychology. He said, “There were really no undergrad business programs. I just took classes that I was excited about and figured that business is about people as much as anything, so psychology felt pretty natural.” He worked his way through college, first as a legal clerk at a law firm and then founding a property management company with a friend from college. This became his segue into his first career in real estate.

Once he graduated from UCLA, Sigal and his business partner folded their small property firm into a larger firm (CBM) that was backed by a major shopping-center developer in Southern California. He says that this experience is where he learned the art of selling. Within a year, he was given the opportunity to launch the company’s Northern California division in the Bay Area. Years later, after the sale of Rapid Logic, he developed a passion for consumer-Internet technologies, specifically social networking. After becoming involved with several social networking ventures, he and his partners founded vSocial in 2005.

With so much varied experience and success, Sigal has learned a few important lessons over the years. He said, “Experience has taught me that people usually fail for one of two reasons. One, they lose hope, or two, they do something stupid and drive off a cliff.” He adds that it is of supreme importance that one have “tangible milestones with dates attached to them” to help one along the way and to know when progress should be occurring. This awareness is what Sigal maintains throughout the inevitable highs and lows that accompany the implementing of startups, helping him “avoid driving off the proverbial cliff, all the while keeping it real.”

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. Bikram Yoga, spend time with my wife and kids, and maintain my blog, *The Network Garden*.

Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?

A. Pink Floyd’s *Atom Heart Mother*.

Q. What is the last magazine you read?

A. Condé Nast’s *Portfolio Magazine*, sort of the *Vanity Fair* of finance.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. *Curb Your Enthusiasm*

Q. Who is your role model?

A. Barry Diller and Richard Branson are two that stand out.



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His most memorable accomplishment was realizing that Rapid Logic had a chance for success after what had been a difficult and turbulent time: "I remember key customer wins, our first major reseller deal, a fateful day when we had to let go of two senior team leads, and the day we sold the company. You remember the good and the bad, the triumph and the failure."

Two individuals have been particularly influential on Sigal throughout the years, among them the founder of the real estate company he worked with whose first career was selling ice cream to grocery stores. Through his real estate company, he was able to create a \$100 million personal empire in real estate. Sigal said, "He was

the consummate marketing innovator, and I never forgot his mantra that regardless of whether selling ice cream or real estate, sales is sales." The other notable mentor was of Sigal's early investors and board members. He taught him the importance of setting and tracking company progress: "He taught me that you cannot improve what you don't measure."

To those just starting out as entrepreneurs in the technology industry, Sigal offered these sage words: "Impatience is youth. There is a tendency to want it all NOW. However, there just are no substitutes to doing, to actually putting the work in and seeing things through to the end. So, paradoxically, you have to learn a measure of patience to

achieve success. Similarly, focus on what you are really passionate about, not what you think you should be doing. So much of the pursuit of success is coping with blind alleys and seeming dead ends, and coping is a lot easier when you know that you are being true to yourself." Indeed, if anyone knows how to succeed with passion and perseverance, it's Mark Sigal.

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Mark Sigal's Blog
www.thenetworkgarden.com

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