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Interview 2: Ian Stockley: From Music to Business

By Dina Medland February 20, 2013

Ian Stockley has no doubts about the role performing arts can play in building a child's confidence. He recalls being 10 years old, singing on stage in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Trial By Jury* and losing his wig – but having the aplomb to flick it back on without pausing in the middle of an aria.

Music has been a defining factor in his life from early music scholarships to the independent school, Charterhouse. The French horn vied later with keyboard and the school choir for his attention, but it was in his last year of an economics degree at the London School of Economics that he faced stark choices.

He applied for graduate jobs in marketing with fast-moving consumer goods companies, and also successfully to the Royal Academy of Music for a scholarship. “I got to the last three interviews with companies on the ‘milk round’ and was asked what other irons I had in the fire. When I mentioned the scholarship they said ‘there must be something wrong with us if you’ve got this far and want to become a singer’.”

So he did just that. He says his “bread and butter” work came from oratorio with choral societies, and by 27, he was married and confronted “the idealism of a classical singer’s life with the realities”.

“I was quite a home bird and didn’t want to be in a hotel every week. My wife was a lawyer, and the goalposts changed. I wasn’t willing to pay the price, or deal with the stress. So I went back to my economics.”

At 30 he secured a job in marketing with Reader’s Digest/EMI. At that time, it was called “below the line” marketing – which for Mr Stockley “combined creativity with the fact that I am analytical”. Joining what was known at the time as “the university of direct marketing”, he stayed for six years, becoming director of its UK music and video division.

They parted company when Reader’s Digest wanted him to move to the US. Instead, he joined Colleagues, a marketing agency, and after four years was ready to set up his own marketing business. Called Entire, he says it was “all about communicating with customers and brands through understanding them more, and using data to communicate with the customer”. The “statistical regression” analysis he studied at LSE was to stand

him in good stead.

Starting Entire was, he says “a big piece of luck” as a change in the law around the electoral roll in 2002 meant companies could no longer buy the full electoral roll for marketing purposes. “We pulled together customer databases as ‘data co-operatives’ and it allowed me to launch my way of marketing,” says Mr Stockley.

In March 2008 he sold Entire to Indicia Group, which was backed by venture capital, and he co-founded Linnaeus Consulting, which offered services aimed at helping clients understand how consumers engage with mobile media as a channel. Linnaeus also became part of Indicia Group in 2010 and Entire merged with Marketing Databasics, with Mr Stockley becoming managing director of a company with a turnover now approaching £10m.

The company’s clients – who he says would have been dismissive of its work in the early days – include Nissan, Heineken UK, Asos, Yorkshire Building Society, Scottish Power and new clients ITV and TalkTalk.

Having spent a decade singing, and then almost 25 years in marketing, Mr Stockley says: “It was the right thing to do, and I am lucky to have changed career path at 30. But in the next 10 years I would love to start to do more with music – it’s a big part of my life. It just does not pay very well.”

His two daughters and son are all musically inclined and encouraged to enjoy it. He holds a non-executive post on the board of Bath Festivals, an annual arts festival, and he remains interested in exploring the funding of UK music festivals along the US model of private investors – “combining my love of music with managing a business” as he puts it.

Secret CV

Any mentors?

Andrew Lynam-Smith, the marketing director at Reader’s Digest, was amazing at allowing his teams to create opportunity – he allowed me to fast track and influenced my management style going forward.

Your first big break?

A big piece of luck – starting my own company when I did, in 2000.

Best career advice to others?

Listen acutely and be prepared for ongoing challenges to your thinking.

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