

Ben Baldwin

**FOUNDER AND OPERATOR  
OF INTERNET  
STARTUP COMPANY**

*BAH Film Studies, Queen's 1996*

*In his own words: "It's important to be honest and happy with yourself because you're stuck with you for the rest of your life."*

**A**s a Film Studies student at Queen's, Ben Baldwin juggled scripts, people, marketing strategies and a \$10,000 budget to produce an award-winning "mockumentary" about a pseudo AMS election. Little did he suspect that four years later he would call on the film experience again, but this time to produce a project closer to his heart — careerXact, a unique on-line career assessment and job application tool.

"Making a film is analogous to starting up a company," claims Ben, the co-founder and CEO of careerXact.

"You have the ability to go in a hundred different directions, but you have to focus because your

resources are limited. Do you go create something that will dominate a smaller market and then lead into bigger things or do you 'start big' with the potential to 'end big'? You ask the same questions in the real world."

Ben designed his online career assessment tool to profile an individual's personality and interests, so-called "soft

skills" that employers now scrutinize as closely as "hard skills" such as education and training. "My business is about empowering people to apply for work based on who they are instead of just what they've done in the past.

Applicants who use careerXact can show employers who sign on with us that they've got the right personality, interests and work style to fit a job, in addition to the right experience and training."

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Making such connections seems to be in his blood. Ben's father packs years of experience as a human resources consultant into a co-leading role at careerXact. Ben recalls acting as his "guinea pig" in a few experiments with different personality assessment tools. By the time he finished high school, inspired by his dad's entrepreneurial spirit and his own success in snapping up

part-time jobs, he was certain that he, too, could be his own boss.

Queen's was at the top of his university wish list. He liked the idea of being surrounded by bright, ambitious people and the fact that he knew hardly anyone on campus ("That forced me to meet new people.") Despite his business bent, he opted for a Film Studies degree.

“I was caught between my right and left brain, between my creative side and the rational, business-oriented side. But I saw my university years as a chance to explore life, and my parents agreed. They urged me to use the four years to understand myself better. I thought I could always do an MBA later. I feared being 40 years old, with a family to support, without ever having explored my dreams. Film gave me the opportunity to explore both sides of my brain at once, since my so-called ‘bird courses’ consisted mostly of business credits.”

For three years, his extracurricular time was dominated by varsity rowing, a grueling sport that toughened more than his body. “It’s more of a mental sport than a physical one. At the start, everyone is pretty much physically equal, so it’s about how hard you push yourself mentally. Will you quit when the other seven people around you aren’t quitting? You’re forced to do things you never thought you could do. It’s great preparation for starting a company!”

By the end of his final year at Queen’s, Ben was still struggling with the right brain-left brain dilemma. He decided against a film career because running an entrepreneurial sales business seemed to beckon him more. The training he would gain from such a position would help him for years to come. He jumped into the business world, working as an estate planner for the London Life Insurance

Company in downtown Toronto. Two years later he left.

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Next, he took a shot at consulting for a firm specializing in organizational development. He had been with the

company for less than a year when, driving to Ottawa one day, he had the brainstorm about careerXact, “I wrote the business plan driving down the highway and then started working on it in my spare time.

Within a month, I had to quit the



**flash!**

Striking out on his own was the best expression of Ben’s personality. In fact, he’s hooked on opportunity, and refers to the mantra of business guru Victor Kiam for inspiration: “Entrepreneurs are simply those who understand that there is little difference between obstacle and opportunity and are able to turn both to advantage.”

consulting work altogether because careerXact was taking up so much of my time.”

In retrospect, he believes his Arts degree was instrumental in steering him towards the start-up, largely because it forced him to make some tough career decisions early on. “If I hadn’t done a general Arts degree, I don’t think I would have had the guts to do what I’m doing now. The degree forces you to be very honest about what you’re good at. I think it helps you focus on who you are, not just what your skill set is. That means the difference between a genuine career path and an instituted one. In that sense, Arts graduates may find it a bit easier to get ahead in the game.”

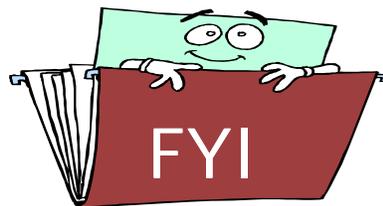
So far, dozens of Fortune 500 employers such as Nike, Xerox and Merrill Lynch have partnered with careerXact to deliver their technology to job applicants. Now working with his father — “we have great synergy” — Ben is confident that his on-line service is

perfectly timed in the world of career management.

“Many companies are moving away from skills as the primary indicator of success and more towards personality. For instance, a Commerce degree doesn’t necessarily make you a great analyst or accountant. Sometimes your skills can create confusion about your own optimal career path.”

Indeed, choosing to strike out on his own is the perfect expression of Ben’s personality. He’s hooked on opportunity, quoting business guru Victor Kiam as saying: “Entrepreneurs are simply those who understand that there is little difference between obstacle and opportunity and are able to turn both to their advantage.”

“If something’s really, really tough,” he adds, “chances are not too many people are doing it, and so there’s a bigger possibility of success for you if you can hang in there.” ❖



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