



THE MAGAZINE FOR DECISION MAKERS

SEARCH:

GO

Subscribe

- ◆ Utah Business Magazine
- ◆ 2004 Book of Lists
- ◆ Wasatch Digital IQ Magazine

Members

- ◆ Register
- ◆ Log In

Current Issue

- ◆ Cover Story
- ◆ Features
- ◆ Players
- ◆ Around Utah
- ◆ People
- ◆ TechKnowledge
- ◆ Legal Briefs
- ◆ Executive Living
- ◆ Small Business Advisor
- ◆ Business Trends
- ◆ Industry Outlook
- ◆ Special Section
- ◆ Focus

Services

- ◆ Events
- ◆ Back Issues
- ◆ Archives
- ◆ Reprints
- ◆ Advertising
- ◆ Editorial Calendar
- ◆ About Us
- ◆ Contact Us
- ◆ Home
- ◆ Administrative Area

People

July 2005

Alan Hall

Entrepreneurial Fundamentals

by Judd Bagley

It's one of the more contentious questions dogging the free enterprise system: Are true entrepreneurs born or made?

Alan Hall, CEO of MarketStar, does nothing to bring resolution to that issue. On one hand, Hall himself will insist with evangelic fervor that entrepreneurial success can be boiled down to a dozen fairly accessible characteristics. On the other hand, Hall's own prosperity seems largely a product of the very way he sees the world around him: comparable to how most see the burden of dirt in need of cleaning where a farmer sees the potential of soil in need of planting.

In 1972 Hall entered the workforce in earnest, armed with the combined experience of a psychology degree from Weber State, a MBA from BYU, two years of missionary service, and a stint in the Peace Corps with his wife Jeanne.

"At that point I had a decision to make," Hall recalls. "I knew I wanted to be an entrepreneur, but I wasn't ready to start my own business. So I chose employment with others until the time was right."

For Hall, that time wouldn't come until 1988, at the entrepreneurially advanced age of 43. In the interim, he learned customer relations and budgeting as manager of a lumberyard, international business with an import/exporter, fundraising at Weber State as alumni director, and diplomacy during seven years as president of Ballet West.

"I'd never been to a ballet. I had to learn to work with the union, the board, the dancers, and increase ticket sales and donations. It was one of the most challenging management experiences I've had," he says.

Having demonstrated that prior exposure to an industry is not required to create success in it, in 1987 Hall — who never used a computer up to that point — left Ballet West to join NetLine, a software company about to launch its first product.

"At NetLine, I saw the need for outsourced sales organizations to help build revenues, but there was none. So I took out a second mortgage, and started MarketStar in my basement," says Hall.



Today MarketStar generates billions in revenues for clients such as Hewlett Packard and Sony.

Regarding MarketStar's accomplishments, Hall prefers first to talk about jobs — some 1,400 created worldwide, including more than 500 in Utah — and second, about how he used the payoff of selling the company to Omnicom in 1999 to finance the Alan and Jeanne Hall Foundation and Grow Utah Ventures.

"Grow Utah Ventures invests in young companies so entrepreneurs can replicate what I'm doing, to create more jobs," Hall explains.

The Alan and Jeanne Hall Foundation's formal mission is 'That there be no poor among us,' and last year distributed more than one million dollars, including micro loans, to aspiring entrepreneurs in third-world nations.

Though often lumped in the venture-financing category, Grow Utah Ventures doesn't have much in common with the rest of the state's fledgling VC community, as Ken Allred, founder of sales consultancy Primary Intelligence, discovered.

"Each time I met with VCs, I felt like I would have to give away everything to get their help. Alan was different. He's in 'give-back' mode, and inside of three minutes he grasped what we were doing and became an investor and mentor," Allred says. "We'd be a vastly different company today were it not for Alan."

Hall says his job is to keep Grow Utah Ventures' portfolio companies centered on the basic task of uniting buyer and seller, and he approaches that role with the same passion and mechanical clarity of a football coach seeking to unite ball and end zone.

"I don't get into the technology and the bits and bytes," he says. "Too deep a dive into that stuff makes you lose focus. Whatever the industry, success depends on fundamentals: markets, controlling costs, hiring good people, and keeping customers happy.

"Do that, and you'll be successful in any business you can dream of."