

# I Sold the Company!

Bryan Rader sold his company. Here's a rather personal look back at the yearlong process.

By Bryan Rader ■ *MediaWorks*

I suppose we were “for sale” the day after we opened our doors. Most companies are. But it never really hit home until we hired our broker. That hiring began an exciting, and emotional, yearlong process.

After ten years of building one of the most successful private cable companies in our territory, we were putting our business on the market. We had expectations on value and timing, but we had no real idea of what to expect.

The first thing our broker did was prepare a thick book about our company. I couldn't believe that ten years of hard work could be summarized in a few pages by a broker. And it couldn't. The book weighed a couple pounds and was thicker than an encyclopedia! Numerous companies, investors, advisors, and potential acquirers signed non-disclosure agreements. Soon this thick book about MediaWorks was being sent around the country like the latest edition of Harry Potter.

## Broker's Role

I later learned that many, many parties will order books all the time – just to stay in touch with the market, read up on a competitor, or to try to appear important in our industry. The “real” prospects are different. They pick up the phone and call management right away. They ask questions. They listen to the seller's needs. And they learn about the obstacles to a possible deal.

After this first round of book distribution, we set up meetings with individual companies to come to Atlanta, to meet with our senior management team and to better understand our business. For a two month period, we had at least one meeting a week with a different po-

tential acquiring group.

Some of these meetings were a lot of fun; others were very stressful, as this part of the process requires a delicate approach. Sellers are trying to figure out the buyers. Buyers are looking for blemishes or deal points. Members of the management team are worried about their jobs. Some buyers were sensitive to this; others were not. I had plenty of “pick me up” meetings with my team after these difficult visits. But I was never more impressed with my staff than I was after those outsider calls.

## The Offers

The next step involved the “offers.” The waiting on deadline day was torture for me. Had we piqued enough interest? Did they understand our model? Were they excited after meeting the team and previewing our cable systems?

I was amazed at how the numbers came in. Some were positive outcomes; others were a little disappointing. I had personally decided which company was the best fit and which one I hoped carried the best opportunity for our shareholders and associates. Our broker was able to rank them in order.

This part of the process separated the “contenders” from the “pretenders,” and it allowed us to decide on two companies we felt could differentiate themselves in one final round. At this point, personalities, professionalism and style mattered too.

I remember being at Disney World with my family at this point of the process. My cell phone went off before and after every ride. I think our final decision was made with our board as I stood on Main Street U.S.A, while the Mickey Mouse parade passed by.

Due-diligence then followed, and a purchase agreement was reached with the buyer of our company. When the process was over, I realized that I had learned more in the past year about our industry than in the previous ten years.

I discovered an industry full of so many entrepreneurs, some with big plans, and others with small-scale plans. But all of them looked at our market with something special to offer, something different to deliver, and something unique to provide. At the end of the day, this process was about people – their hearts, their goals, their motivations.

One day, as we were at the final step of completing our deal (and I was running around pulling my hair out), I found our temporary receptionist in our lobby crying. Her childhood dog had just died. I wanted to run back to my office to help finish our deal but this young lady was sobbing. So I spent the next 15 minutes with her calming her down.

We can never lose sight of what's important in business, and what impact we may have. And in this yearlong process, I don't think we did. It's our great people that created our great company, and it's the people we're joining in our new organization that will give us a chance to continue creating something special, and bigger.

“For sale” is not an end; it's just the beginning. **BBP**

## About the Author

*Bryan Rader is president of MediaWorks and the IMCC. The sale of MediaWorks to DirecPath is detailed in our News & Views this month. Bryan promises even more details about the process in an upcoming column.*