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No Escaping the Hard Work at Hoodiny

This FIU grad named his new Web entertainment startup after the famous magician and escape artist. Here's a typical day on the job

by [Demian M. Bellumio](#)

I am president of Hoodiny Entertainment Group, a Miami-based company that provides digital services for the Hispanic entertainment industry. The idea came about while I was working at Terremark Worldwide ([TWW](#)). I saw the growth and success that Web 2.0 companies (MySpace, etc.) had in the U.S., with no comparable model for Spanish-speaking markets, including the U.S. Hispanic market (see BusinessWeek.com, 7/12/06, "[How to Tap the Hispanic Market](#)"). As for the company name, I've always been a fan of Houdini's and we wanted to escape the status quo that exists in the market.

Hoodiny's core project is called elHood.com—a Web site that combines a digital-entertainment experience with a social-networking platform. The site has already attracted thousands of artists, who set up profiles to connect with fans. We earn money primarily by selling ads.

As president, I'm in charge of developing and executing the strategic direction while overseeing day-to-day operations. This being my third startup (my other two are BroadSpan Capital investment bank and Tiles & Stones tile and marble retailer), I sort of knew what I was getting into. But no two companies are ever the same. In Hoodiny's case, I was blessed to find an initial set of investors that believed in me and funded the idea while it was still a PowerPoint presentation. That allowed the team to start Hoodiny without a major lifestyle impact.

FAMILY AFFAIR

Looking at the past months, I'm surprised at the rapid evolution of the company. We didn't expect to have such a welcoming response from major music labels, since this is brand-new territory for them. I went from being pretty much an outsider in the entertainment world six months ago to talking to heads of major music labels today.

Hoodiny has a familial environment—literally. My 30 full-time employees include my mom, dad, brother, and sister-in-law. Here is a typical day in my world:

7:00 a.m.—I start my day at the gym with my fiancé Ainniz. Sharing a training session in the morning is a wonderful way to start the day.

8:15 a.m.—On my way to work, I place a call to our Madrid office to see how things are going.

8:45 a.m.—I get to the office. There are a few e-mails from Europe, but my inbox is pretty clean since I reviewed most messages before going to sleep last night. I sit down with my brother Ariel to go over some new designs and functionalities we will send to our chief technology officer for development in the coming days. My brother is the design guru, making my ideas come to life.

10:00 a.m.—I have a conference call with bankers to go over materials for investors. We review the financial model, validate some of the assumptions, and put final touches on the business plan. We close the call by reviewing the target list of new investors we will approach during the financing process.

11:30 a.m.—I leave the office for lunch with a music-label executive. On my way, I place a call to our Los Angeles office to speak to the CTO about the status of a new software release and the chief operating officer about the marketing campaign we launched last night with a new artist.

Noon—Lunch poolside at a Miami Beach hotel. I can't get over the fact that on this beautifully sunny day, I need to go back to the office for another seven hours. During the meeting, we reach an agreement: Now, all of the artists of his label will call elHood home.

2:00 p.m.—I'm half an hour late to a presentation with the audiovisual manager, here from Spain to show senior management the latest creations. We love them!

2:45 p.m.—I can finally sit down with Outlook. By this time, dozens of e-mails have accumulated.

5:00 p.m.—I have a strategy session to discuss some new ideas for elHood TV. Launching in about a month, elHood TV will have the social aspects of a YouTube-type mechanism but will behave like a television. Video channels will be generated by proprietary algorithms based on your preferences and your friends' preferences.

7:30 p.m.—I pick up Ainniz for dinner and tell her about a little surprise. Before dinner she's going to enjoy one of the fringe benefits of my job—front-row tickets to Ricky Martin's *MTV Unplugged* concert. She deserves it for all her patience and support during these very demanding times.

11:45 p.m.—We arrive home after an incredible performance, quiet dinner, and an hour of networking at the official after-party. Exhausted, I check a few e-mails but must leave about 50 unread messages for the morning. It has been a long, long day.

My undergraduate degree from [Florida International University's College of Business Administration](#) was definitely the catalyst that allowed me to jump-start my career. Without it, I might never have gotten into Wall Street's selective investment banking sector, which provided me with the skills and experience I credit for my successes as an entrepreneur.

When I look for new candidates for my company, I don't only look at degree and GPA. I ask, What have they accomplished while at school? Did they have to work a job to pay for tuition? Were they involved in the community? Did they complement academic with practical experience? How badly did they want to succeed?

I maintain a very close relationship with FIU as chairman of the Alumni Circle of the College of Business Administration. I plan to go back once my schedule and company allow to get an MBA (see BusinessWeek.com, 8/7/06, "[B-School Is Hip Again](#)"). I'm a strong believer in personal growth. There's always something to be learned at school.

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