

Go West Young Man...

Now, here's how a 45-year-old entrepreneurial Londoner left a very successful business to become 'An Englishman in LA'.

Jeff Cane single-handedly pioneered what was to become a UK telephone entertainment revolution (fully documented). Between the years 1979 - 1985 he turned his answering machine into a broadcasting media phenomenon that was to become the 'Internet' before the Internet - and he started it all in a tiny 6' x 3' x 7' 'room' under the stairs of his Fulham flat!!

In 1979, using a talent for recording (he is an ex club DJ) together with a bizarre sense of humour, Cane made 'Monty Pythonish' type sketches (on an answering machine) for anyone that dialed his home. It wasn't long before the word spread and the media (TV, newspapers and magazines) picked up on this unusual phone number that gave you 'a good laugh'. Once they did that, the 100 odd calls per week rocketed to thousands and he was getting listeners from all over the world!

Over the next few years Cane's 'service' went through the roof, making him a minor media and a major telephone celebrity. Due in no small part to Mrs. Thatcher's intervention and a missive from her to the heads of the phone company 'to look into this new entertainment facility'. This came about from letters written to her by fans pleading for Cane to get help in his project as his service was always engaged - ie, more phone lines needed...

To cope with the calling traffic he installed 20 specially made machines (to his own spec.) into his home and still the lines were jammed. The BBC featured him several times both on TV and radio, as did many local stations. His clipping file (he still has it) looked like that of any successful rock star - the major difference being that unlike the rock star, Cane, for all his perseverance and dedication was not earning a penny - the telephone company was owned by the government!

But like all good ideas, if you hang on long enough, the tide will change, six years of pioneering was about to pay off... big time!

As ships in the night, a chance meeting led to the business connection he needed, but still the question 'how to get paid for this great idea?' The missing piece of the jigsaw was just about to fall into place - the telephone company (more than aware of Mr. Cane and building on his grass roots model) was about to allow private businesses to use its phone lines to create 'phone programmes' and generate revenue at a higher cost per call and split 50/50. With the 'missing piece' in place, **Cane's idea raised a million pounds of venture capital** - he and his partner were off and running!!

The years '85 - '89 were very heady ones, Cane had more than a head start over his competitors and the figures for the company showed this year after year - he was very content - or so he thought The business had changed drastically over a period of time and as 1990 approached regulations clamped down on what could and what could not be done - businessmen had taken the cream out of creativity and the horrendous sleaze was alive and gaining ground, but what the hell, Cane was getting well paid for his 'wilderness' years - even if he wasn't using his brain too much!

It was whilst on a chance visit to see a friend in California in 1991, his first trip, that Cane felt the excitement of creativity once again, although he had no idea that this time his endeavors would take a most unsuspecting turn.

It had taken him six years to see a single penny from his pioneering exploits and then another six for him to consider throwing caution to the wind and letting it all go, at the absolute height of the 'party' - was he mad - maybe?

Pioneers are restless creative people that always have a need to go one step further and that step does not always have to be in the direction of the bank, for them the reward is definitely in the journey and this was a 6000 mile one.

* To see some of the history of Cane's creation, please visit www.MySpace.com/TheCurlyman07 - The Sunday Times is England's most prestigious Sunday newspaper, the article you see (look for Mrs. Thatcher) covered most of the back page...

LA (no matter what anyone says) has an energy that to some outsiders seems tangible to tap into, Cane felt this energy and it in turn fueled his turned off creativity but what to do with it?

It wasn't long before he realized that this town had everything EXCEPT a medieval scribe, a person that would create a gilded parchment document (as a gift) using contemporary words (you figure).

LA is a big gift giving town that loves European history and Brits that know about it! So with this in mind he went back to London to research the major libraries and museums. What he came up with and made was parchment (that looked so real it was uncanny) poetry, a medieval looking document with a cleverly worded poem about the recipient.

In no time his sample document had opened several doors and many celebrities amongst them (the current marriage certificate is a direct descendant of these documents), Leeza Gibbons, Pamela Anderson & Roseanne are owners of his parchments. His marriage certificates also hung in the plush Hotel Bel-Air.

The leap to manufacturing came as Cane wanted to take his ideas to more of America - the way to do so - 'The Gift Shows'. These major shows allowed manufacturers to exhibit throughout the different states of America, the only problem for Cane was that the 'Parchment Poem' whilst great for LA wasn't really commercial enough on the open market!

From a lack of creativity to creativity overkill, Cane was in full swing once again and it wasn't long before he had created his first product 'The aged wooden tablet', it was both simple and effective (see tablets), based on his very realistic parchment paper, ancient images and an uncanny knack for creating authentic looking relics! In time he added Charger Plates, Framed Parchment Prints and his 'piece de resistance' The Cement Tile.

His most important piece of inspiration came in 1994 when he photographed his best selling range of Images, A Place of Angels at Highgate in London.

His recreative genius has opened many giant doors, including those of Mattel, Neiman Marcus, The Huntingdon Library and Worldwide communications behemoth, Lucent Technologies.

Nothing stays the same in life and perfection can always be perfected (at least in Cane's eyes) so the journey from parchment poem to the wonderful creations you see today has by no means been easy, countless hours trying to perfect a look, having to make every product they produce, because outside quality was way below par and above all the constant need to equal the past in aging - (is Cane a Dorian Gray?).

*I asked Cane what his business 'about turn' meant to him 15 years after he 'went West'. He replied "**above all I believe I have found my mission and the reason that I left my business at the height of it's success - Angels**". His most important piece of inspiration came in 1994 when he photographed his best selling range of Images, 'A Place of Angels' at Highgate in London. His Angel and Celebratory work has given so much pleasure to people (the accolades are many) that the rewards are unmeasureable. After all these years have passed Cane has probably placed more Angels in peoples homes than anyone else in America and uncannily enough, he's doing it all (unplanned) from ... The City of Angels!*

Cane's writing skills (he wrote thousands of scripts over the years as a broadcaster, for himself and others) has held him in good stead, for today he writes all the promotional material, all the history behind the artwork he uses and above all, the many word passages that adorn his wonderful Angel artwork. I asked him if he had a favorite, without hesitation he replied, "Good friends are like Angels, you don't have to see them to know they are there." It is without a doubt his most profound passage of words, inspired as he says, by leaving a dear dear friend behind in the UK in 1992...

*Cane has developed and created several exceptional products (without competition and **ALL Made In America**) over the years and is showing no signs of stopping, which is great news for the consumer, talking of which, you may well be wondering where the connection is between telephone entertainment pioneer and the pioneer owner of "the most unusual company this side of the 15th century" . . . maybe it's just that . . . pioneer!*