Our Conversation with Eduardo Hauser

Hauser turned to entrepreneurship after a successful career in senior management positions in digital media, traditional media, entertainment and communications.

In 2006 Hauser founded DailyMe, a technology leader in the field of dynamic, personalized discovery and distribution of digital content across delivery platforms. DailyMe's system currently powers the presentation of information (content, ads and commerce) for more than 30 million unique users, covering more than 100 sites, including its own destination at www.dailyme.com.

Before founding DailyMe, Hauser spent 7 years at AOL as Executive Vice President for Latin America. Hauser conceived the idea to launch the AOL services in the region, secured the initial funding, negotiated a pan-regional JV agreement and helped launch the company's presence in Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Puerto Rico and the US Hispanic market.

Prior to AOL, Hauser spent 11 years with the Cisneros Group of Companies in various positions including Corporate Vice President; Vice President of News & Information for Venevision; Managing Director of the Corporate Office and Chief of Staff to Gustavo Cisneros.

Hauser has a keen interest in media and technology. He serves on the Board of Directors of National Public Radio (NPR), the Journalism Board of the Knight Foundation and the Board of Visitors of Duke University's School of Law.

He holds a Law Degree (J.D.) from Caracas' UCAB (1991), and a Master's Degree in Law (L.I.M.) from Duke University (1993).

**Duke I&E:** Law school to tech startup entrepreneur - not the most traditional path. Did you always know you wanted to be an entrepreneur?

**EH:** You're right - not the most common trajectory. The truth is, I graduated from law school with every intention of pursuing a career as a corporate attorney or a practicing lawyer at a firm. It never occurred to me to be an entrepreneur.

**Duke I&E:** So what happened?

**EH:** Life is funny. Coming out of Duke, I was offered a very interesting position to open up the New York office of Venezuela's Cisneros Group, a large broadcast, media, technology and telecommunications organization.
It wasn’t a legal job, but a business one -- and surprisingly enough, it was that corporate job that set me down the entrepreneurial path. Here’s why: seeing [Chairman and CEO] Gustavo Cisneros in action, veteran business-builder that he was, inspired me to follow in his entrepreneurial footsteps.

In fact, after many years, I was lucky enough to team up with him to form AOL Latin America in 1998 -- and it was the following six years that really cemented my path as an entrepreneur. Working alongside someone you admire so much, rolling up your sleeves and experiencing the adrenaline, the challenges, the thrill of building your own “thing”…it’s hard to go back.

That’s why I was ready to move on to the next big idea once we got AOL Latin America up and corporate.

**Duke I&E:** That’s when you came up with the idea for DailyMe?

**EH:** Yes, I launched DailyMe in 2006.

**Duke I&E:** How did you come up with the idea?

**EH:** It really sprang from two things: One, my own frustration as a news junkie with not being able to find the most relevant news I craved (too much sifting), and two, seeing the writing on the wall for the traditional newspaper industry. By 2005, I’d been invited to be on the board of the Knight Foundation, and I knew from my fellow board members, many of whom were veteran publishers, that the future of their industry was fundamentally threatened.

Selfishly, I wanted to create a news engine that would not only aggregate all the important, breaking news content available, but be “smart” enough to know which stories I, Eduardo Hauser, cared about (Pakistan flood - yes, American Idol winner - no), and offer those up, front and center.

Turns out I wasn’t the only one who wanted a service like this -- we made the recommendation engine and behavioral tracking technology, which we call Newstogram, so powerful that online publishers looking for new solutions -- like my colleagues on the Knight board -- are gladly partnering with us today.

Newstogram now runs in the background on major publishers such as Variety.com and Spanish language publisher ImpreMedia, and is currently under review with a dozen major online content sites.

**Duke I&E:** Has Duke played into any of this success?

**EH:** Absolutely. Over the course of my career, and especially early on, I befriended or became acquainted with many people who’d gone through Duke Law, and found them all to be extraordinary managers. I believe the foundation provided by a Duke Law degree is
very robust. There were points when not having an MBA made me doubt my skills – but ultimately I’ve come to realize that Duke Law provides a very interesting tool set, both analytic and practical, for entrepreneurial success.

**Duke I&E:** Glad to hear it! Well, it sounds like things are going well - have there been any challenges?

**EH:** Of course. With every entrepreneurial venture come challenges. I’d say we’ve experienced them at two levels: First, the economy in general. DailyMe started in 2006, and by 2008 we all thought the world was coming to an end. Like a lot of startups, we’ve experienced the challenges of a macro economy adverse to any kind of new ventures. Second, the struggling media industry. Between 2007 and into 2010, we’re seeing traditional media models go through tremendous transformations. Underneath the overall economic difficulties, there are definitely tough challenges related to media specifically.

As a result, we’ve been forced to ask ourselves: how do we fit into overall technology-slash-media puzzle? How do we scale? How do we optimally price? Who are the best partners? How do you hire the right people?

Definitely some legitimate hurdles. As someone who’s weathered the storm, do you have any advice for other entrepreneurs just starting out?

Absolutely. Number one, start small - that means staff, budget and ideas. Number two, stay nimble. You’ve got to be able to adapt to circumstances that change rapidly Number three, surround yourself with people who are equally or more intellectual than you are, because it keeps you on your toes. Lastly, experiment. In this world you’ve got to be prepared and willing to morph - very few entrepreneurs finish off with the exact same idea they started out with.

Also – and I believe this very strongly – networking is a fundamental key to entrepreneurial success, probably more so than in any other field. It comes in many flavors – including your academic background. The fact that Duke is developing such a strong network of community entrepreneurs is very encouraging. My advice: take advantage of it! I know I will…