

# SAN DIEGO BUSINESS JOURNAL

## SMALL BUSINESS

SPOTLIGHT: Groovy Like a Movie

■ BY JESSICA LONG

As the son of a successful businessman who worked for his father from the age of 12, Brent Altomare seems a shoo-in to know exactly what it takes to run a business of his own. But the 33-year-old owner of Groovy Like a Movie knows all too well that the downside of having grown up surrounded by success is that it can hide the many pitfalls on the bumpy ride to the top.

Today, Altomare, whose father started Auto Trader of San Diego in 1980, is flying high as the owner of a growing production company. Had he known how tough a startup can be, he said he doesn't know if he'd have had the courage to make the entrepreneurial leap.

"I was lucky because my father as a role model had such tremendous success with the Auto Trader that I wasn't exposed to all the hardships that you can expect in small-business ownership, at least not at the age when I was starting to think about what I wanted to be," said Altomare, noting that his No. 1 advice to people considering starting their own business is: "Brace yourself."

Another key ingredient in Altomare's success has been his sense of humor.

"I crack myself up," Altomare said. "It's very important in my line of work to do that because there's so much stress and you're dealing with so many types of people, from creative to business to technical and even lawyers sometimes. Part of your job as the boss is to be the peacemaker and I found having a sense of humor comes in handy when you're doing that."

### VITALS

**Name:** Brent Altomare.

**Title:** Executive producer.

**Company:** Groovy Like a Movie.

**Company address:** 9606 Aero Drive, Suite 2200, San Diego.

**Phone number:** (858) 715-0300.

**Year founded:** 2000.

**Prior business experience:** Director for live theaters in Los Angeles and San Diego, marketing coordinator for the Auto Trader of San Diego.

**Average hours worked weekly:** Too many! 50ish.

**Source of startup capital:** Sale of *Auto Trader* magazines.

**2005 revenue:** \$250,000.

**2004 revenue:** \$144,000.

**Number of employees:** 5.

**Web site:** [www.groovylikeamovie.com](http://www.groovylikeamovie.com).

### BACKGROUND

**Birthplace:** Tampa, Fla.

**Education:** Bachelor of Arts, directing for live theater, Pepperdine University.



Melissa Jacobs

**Brent Altomare is the executive producer of Groovy Like a Movie based in San Diego.**

**Age:** 33.

**Current residence:** Talmadge.

**Family:** Wife Jennifer; a dog named Latte.

**Hobbies:** Photography, movies, listening to music, reading, working out.

### JUDGMENT CALLS

**Reason for getting into business:** I love making the decisions, being "the guy."

**How I plan to grow the business:** We have made the move to high definition video production. **Biggest plus of business ownership:** Building a team and watching it flourish and grow. Not having to answer to anyone but your customers and your conscience.

**Biggest drawback:** The risk of failure. Knowing that I have people who count on me for their livelihood and that making a poor decision can harm my team.

**Biggest business strength:** My creativity and storytelling ability.

**Biggest business weakness:** Organization. My desk looks like the floor of a teenage boy's room minus the dirty underwear. That's why I surround myself with skillful, organized people.

**Biggest risk:** Making the leap to high definition production.

**Smartest business decision:** Hiring, training and retaining the right people for my team. Sure we have some cool tools, but without the people to manipulate those tools, they are nothing but wasted capital.

**Biggest business mistake:** I didn't advertise enough early on. I had a little bit of a "if you build

it, they will come" mentality when I first opened the business. I really thought I was that cool. It also took me a long time to get comfortable with going out and doing the sales thing.

**Toughest career decision:** My decision to try and build my business in San Diego instead of one of the traditional large media markets.

**Best way to stay competitive:** "Do unto others." Treat everyone the way you want to be treated. Do your best work for every client, large and small, and practice consistent, excellent customer service. If you build a strong relationship with a client, price becomes less of an issue and your client won't shop around.

**How I measure success:** We have two measures of success: profitability and the satisfaction of my clients, my team and myself.

### GOALS

**Goals yet to be achieved:** I want to be the king of my own back yard. I want to be the biggest, the best and the most productive media production company in San Diego.

**My five-year business plan:** I intend to hire several more creative team members and grow my sales staff.

**I would sell my business only if:** I don't know under what circumstances I'd sell Groovy. I'm having so much fun that any offer would have to be outrageous — I mean irresponsibly, criminally huge — in order for me to even think about it.

**Guiding principles I will continue to follow:** Ethics, treat your team and your clients right and stay on top of technology.