

# SelfInformed

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*NASE Member  
Mark Dominiak*

## Member Spotlight



# Branding Self Employment

*Mark Dominiak is the Principle Strategist of Insight Garden, located in Whiting, Indiana outside of Chicago. Insight Garden's mission is to cultivate ideas that will have a powerful marketplace impact for their clients. Mark also serves on the Board of Directors for the Whiting-Robertsdale Chamber of Commerce and continues the long time practice of traveling to his alma mater, Ball State University, to lecture at advertising classes every Spring. Joining in 2004, the most important benefit was access to quality health insurance. Once he knew he could provide quality coverage for his family, Mark was confident I could go into business for myself.*





### **What inspired you to enter the field you are in?**

During my school years, I always did well with and enjoyed math, language and creative classes. Advertising seemed to be a field where I could weave all of those skills together. Media in particular was a place where math skills were critical and there was demand for quality people. I always loved watching commercials in my youth and thought it would be really neat to be in that industry.

### **When and why did you start your business?**

I started Insight Garden, Inc. in 2004. My old agency FCB was one of the last relatively independent major agencies to be purchased by a holding company. The new holding company flushed out many fairly senior people upon taking control. At that time, I interviewed at many media companies, but also started to develop a business plan as another possible path. That interview process opened my eyes quite a bit. Everyone I interviewed with was so corporate and impersonal. It really felt that another job at a large company was just a path to immersing into someone else's culture and beliefs. I decided not to go down that path and create a business that was definitely entrepreneurial and a real expression of who I was as a media professional and business person.

### **What challenges have you faced in your business? How have you overcome them?**

There have been two large challenges. First was the start-up phase. It's hard to gain traction the first couple of years. Project work builds slowly and it takes time to create

significant revenue. The only solution is to tighten the belt and expenses and weather the short-term storm. The second challenge is cash flow. It's great to have a healthy project load and multiple revenue streams, but it wreaks havoc not to have invoices be paid on time. It helps greatly to maintain a small reserve of cash as able and to work with partners to get through those hiccups.

### **How do you market your business?**

Being in the marketing industry, one would think I heavily market my business, but I really don't. Most of my marketing is truly word of mouth shared across my large network of connections. Early on, I invested a number of years writing articles for Television Week magazine. Those articles were wonderful for getting Insight Garden's name out. I also was able to post those pieces to my company web site, which seemed to be a great resource for people looking for that type of information. I also manage my LinkedIn connections and try to do a consistent job of reaching out to friends and business associates to keep my name and services top of mind. I also do a number of small ad placements and sponsorships.

### **What role does technology play in your business?**

It might not seem like it, but technology plays a big role in my business. Whether I work for clients remotely or whether I come into their offices to work, I basically have my office slung over my shoulder. I have a working laptop, plenty of historical files on thumb drives, a smart phone, etc. If I have a wireless connection, I'm ready to go.

On the laptop, I also carry subscriptions to a number of media and syndicated consumer research resources that help uncover insights on consumer behavior or media pricing. In the old days, research like that was accessible only on dedicated hardware or through bound volumes. Being able to access that kind of info from the convenience of a wireless connection is a fantastic benefit. I provide a ton of flexibility for my clients. That flexibility would be hard to bring to the table without technology.

### **Are you required to travel a lot?**

I travel a lot back and forth from my home office in Northwest Indiana into Chicago. That is a simple, short commute. I only occasionally leave the Chicago area on business. I don't mind going out of town if needed, but for me, that situation does not happen often.

### **Are your clients typically short term contracts or long term? How does this affect your business planning?**

My clients are a mix of short and long term contracts. Up to this point, the mix has not affected my business planning. There are generally a broad enough number of contracts to provide multiple revenue streams over time. I may not be consistent month to month or across years, but the years themselves generally balance out across time.

### **What's your schedule like, what's a typical day for you?**

I think the most interesting thing is that I rarely have a typical day. Depending on the week and on client project needs, I can be on the road to a client or ad agency offices for an entire day, or if there are no key meetings on the calendar, I may be ensconced in my home office. One common aspect of my days though tend to be weaving in things that I may need to do around the house or out of the house with family or personally. Being self-employed, I am not on anyone's clock but my own. If I need to attend to personal things during the day, I will do that and come

back to project work later when I have the free time. It is not uncommon for me to work into the late evening or on weekends. That might sound onerous, but I have plenty of Tuesdays where I may only put in a few hours of work.

### **Is that flexible schedule the best thing about being self-employed?**

Yes, the flexibility to work primarily from home, largely on my own schedule. It's very nice not being stuck behind someone else's desk during 40 specific hours a week.

### **What's the most important piece of advice you would give to someone starting their own business?**

I would say not to let the fear of uncertainty stop you from taking the chance. Learning new things and conquering uncertainty is actually one of the most fulfilling benefits of becoming self-employed. When you work for someone else for a long time, it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking their work paradigm is the way career life operates. But there is a whole other world of new career and business acumen out there to experience. All it takes is to boldly step forward to embrace the uncertainty and learn from it, not run from it.



## **Learn More in the NASE Small Business Locator**

Learn more about Mark Dominiak, Insight Garden, and other Self Employed businesses in the **NASE Small Business Locator directory**. You can add your own company to the NASE Small Business Locator in up to three categories at no charge – it is a free benefit to NASE members.