



Coming **FULL CIRCLE**

Wade Hansen travels in some pretty impressive circles. While in his early 30s, he was among a small group of people personally advising computer magnate Michael Dell on which hot new high-techs Dell Computer should invest in — or steer clear of. Today, as founder and manager of his own business valuation and investment banking firm, Hansen is much less concerned about which circles he's in, and much more interested in creating and connecting new circles that help individuals and businesses grow and succeed.

words: Jay Seither photos: Brian Camarao

Early in his career, which began in the Houston Ernst & Young LLP office in 1990, Hansen recognized “a desire to organize people around social, professional and philanthropic interests.” He liked looking for ways to match people from these three areas in the name of a specific issue or cause, and creating “circles of connectivity.” Over time, Hansen recognized his talent for nurturing such circles, which would expand and overlap, creating new circles of interest – and a vast network.

Everything is new again

Following his time at EY and a two-year stint with Bank One, Hansen realized he wanted to be more directly involved with the clients he was serving: he wanted to expand his circle. He enrolled in an MBA program at the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University. There, Hansen was introduced to international consulting. “I just loved the idea that every few months you would

come into a new client situation that didn’t have a defined solution – one that would test your creative and analytic skills and require you to move people to take action.” That, says Hansen, is when he understood what it meant to be an advisor – and that he wanted to become one.

So in June 1994, Hansen joined McKinsey & Company. For five years he advised clients on merger and acquisition matters and growth strategies, with a focus on high-tech clients. Even though he thoroughly enjoyed his work, for Hansen, there was still something missing: “Management consulting leaves one step undone – an action or implementation.”

To scratch that itch, in 1999, just a year away from making partner at McKinsey, Hansen joined Dell Ventures, the investment arm of Dell Computer Corporation. “The opportunity to work with Michael (Dell) around strategic investing in tech companies – that was the execution step I’d been missing,” notes Hansen. Hansen admits his Dell days were

heady times. He was barely 30 years old and advising “probably one of the top five” people in technology. Of the 20 companies Hansen recommended that Dell invest in, 18 went public. While Dell gave Hansen the execution experience he craved, it also opened new doors.

Business models with traction

During his time at Dell, Hansen came to recognize another of his strengths: the ability to recognize patterns. “I’d hear the same story from four individuals in a particular sector who were trying to solve a similar problem,” Hansen says. Armed with growing insight into which business models “had the most gas,” Hansen found himself increasingly interested in tapping into his circles of influence to help the very companies that he was identifying as investments. In June 2000, on the heels of the dot.com meltdown, he left Dell to form MHT Partners, a merchant bank specializing in high-tech mergers, acquisitions and capital formation. Three years later, he formed Cabrillo Advisors to focus more specifically on the types of companies he wanted to serve.

Hansen’s talent for matching up people to solve problems goes beyond the business deal. An avid wine collector, Hansen proved true to his nature and started to organize different groups around wine tastings. As president of the San Diego Bordeaux group, last year he organized the San Diego Wine Affair, bringing 35 to 40 wineries together for the benefit of Rady Children’s Hospital. “Most of the people involved were business associates in one way or another,” says Hansen. “Having the opportunity to dovetail my business interests with my love of wine and doing something for charity – it just doesn’t get much better.”

Hansen’s success, and that of the hundreds of venture and start-up companies he has assisted over the years, all comes back to his circles of relationships. “I’ve learned that there are circles that reinforce each other in creating and growing successful businesses,” he notes. “If I can help form the circles that allow people to connect, resolve issues, consider opportunities and weigh the options – that’s what I truly value and enjoy.” ■



EY alumnus Wade Hansen (left) with David O'Brien, EY’s Americas Director of Communications and Marketing. The two worked in the Dallas office together in the early 1990s and recently reconnected at the EY Capital Growth Strategies conference. Among other things, the two discussed Hansen’s success at McKinsey & Company (of which he is also an alum) in creating “informal, organic alumni circles” that dovetail into the company’s well-respected, but more structured, alumni program.

David O’Brien was recently tapped by Mike Cullen, EY’s Global Vice Chair of People, to lead the development of a global alumni effort at EY. According to O’Brien, the primary focus is to strengthen relationships with our nearly 750,000 alumni – one of the organization’s largest and most valued stakeholder groups – while creating an engaging, valuable and consistent experience for our alumni around the world.