

A Cut Above

Diamond Studios has thrived for 30 years in a tough business because they keep a watchful eye on innovation.

By Joe O'Donnell

Photos by Brian Francis

What began three decades as an enterprise created by a mother and son team has grown into a consistently innovative video, web and mobile application company that definitely stays up with the times.

"Throughout 30 years of service, we've thrived in good times and survived during bad, all due to our simple philosophy of giving our clients more than they demanded at a value they never expected. It's really that simple. We are committed to doing whatever it takes to deliver quality work under the tightest of deadlines, the minimalist of budgets and the shortest notice. It's what we do. And it's what keeps our clients coming back for repeat business and referring us to others," says company founder Joe Miele.

Diamond Studios opened for business in 1982 by producing local television commercials for Channel 21 which just signed on the air and needed a company to produce local spots.

"Then as time went on we gradually grew into producing regional then national television spots for clients across the U.S. We had a philosophy that we would give the client 50 percent more value for their dollar which would eventually lead to getting more and higher-end work. Today we still give every client substantially more value for their dollar. It's become our trademark. Actually my trademark is to never say no. We will do whatever the client asks when they ask for it," says Miele.

Joe's mother, Maryann, was also the founding partner. Now retired, she makes an occasional appearance in the office.

"We started with a camera and recorder in the trunk of a car. The office was in the dining room and later advanced to a "studio" in a spare bedroom. A humble beginning indeed," Miele says.

That all changed rapidly as the company began to take off in the mid-1980s. "We have had many many memorable clients over the years. One that still stands out is Long Lewis Ford. Remember "In the Long Run, it's Long Lewis- Ya Heah." They were our first 'big' client in 1983. At that time we did not have any editing equipment and would rent from a competitor by the hour. After a little more than a year I got up the nerve to ask Mr. Vaughn Burrell, then owner of Long Lewis to advance us some money so we could buy our own edit suite. We promised to pay back double in services. Mr. Burrell didn't hesitate. With nothing more than a promise to make it right, he gave us \$30,000. How many people do you know today that would do such a thing? He was an incredibly honest and honorable man that trusted other people would be the same. We will remember him always. And, yes, of course, we paid back every cent.

"Many years later a struggling entrepreneur came to us to do a video demo for a new product he had developed. We agreed on a price and proceeded to produce the video. When it came time

for payment we learned that Mr. Burrell was backing his invention. We did not accept payment. Mr. Burrell had paid it forward. We were delighted at the opportunity to repay his kindness," Miele says.

In the late 1980s early 1990s Diamond had a large facility in Homewood with four separate edit bays and an animation room. "During one election year we had two Democratic and two Republican candidates 'in the house' at the same time. It took two extra staff members all day to make sure none of the opposition met in

the hallways, kitchen or rest rooms. For each candidate there was an entourage of three to four people. Talk about traffic control. It was like Chicago O'Hare Airport on the day before Thanksgiving. One of the hardest day of work we've ever experienced," Miele says.

About a dozen years ago when the Internet came into being, Diamond began producing web sites, web videos, and other services related to web needs. Today it accounts for a third of their business.

"Then about a year ago I thought apps would be fun and cool as well. Now it is 20 percent of our business.

I love trying new things. It keeps my job fun and exciting," Miele says.

"Diamond has never been a job, it's always been more like a hobby. I feel like I'm the luckiest person in the world to get to do what I love. Especially after 30 years. People ask me all the time when I will retire. I always say after another 30 years. I never want to retire. I would go crazy with boredom and why would I stop doing what I love?"

Today Diamond operates in three divisions: The HD video division produces television commercials and videos for online communications and training

needs. The interactive division develops interactive kiosks, as well as, web application development and reward programs. The mobile division provides iPhone, iPad and Android apps with full CMS server-side support and development.

Barbara Fowler began with Diamond over ten years ago and has grown into quite a seasoned media professional. Having a vocal and acting background, she has been in front of the camera singing and acting since she was very young. These days, she gets to work with Coach Nick Saban, Bart Starr, Gene Stallings, Coach Gene Chizik,



The Diamond crew in the lobby of their new Hoover studio. Diamond was named one of three finalists in the Birmingham Business Alliance's 2012 Small Business Awards.

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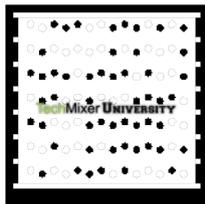
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Coach Dan Mullens, and many more professionals and executives.

Fowler moved into the role of president and executive producer over five years ago. "When I first started

with Diamond, I didn't even know there was such a company in Birmingham that did such amazing work worldwide. I knew media was an area I had always been interested in, but knew very little about behind the camera. I am very thankful that Joe saw those talents in me and has taught me so much about media over the past ten years. He and I make a great team together and every day is a new adventure. With new media and technology advances, we are always learning how to make Diamond even better and serving our clients to the utmost is our number one goal.

"I'm so blessed to do what I love and enjoy it every day. I've had many wonderful memories on location shoots. Two of my recent favorites are when we filmed on location with Coach Nick Saban. I had heard so many stories about him, but once I met him in person and spent several days by his side filming, I had a whole new appreciation for who he was and what he stands for. Another one of my favorite moments is when we had to hire and hold auditions for a Chinese Pug for a flooring shoot. Since I used to raise pugs, I was in heaven and just fell in love with each pug I saw. We ended up hiring the pug off the movie set that was filming "The Three Stooges" in Atlanta. I look forward to a long-career at Diamond, but unlike Joe, I may want to retire at some point, but I'm still having too much fun to even think about that for a long time!" ●

Diamond principals: Barbara Fowler, Maryann Miele and Joe Miele.

