



## **Henry Blodget**

### **Editor-in-Chief, Business Insider**

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**Welcome to Media Masters, a series of one to one interviews with people at the top of the media game. Today, I'm joined by Henry Blodget, founder and editor-in-chief of Business Insider. Starting out as a freelance writer, Henry moved into corporate finance, making his name predicting the rise of amazon.com, but later left the industry after he was charged with securities fraud. In 2007, Henry founded Silicon Alley Insider, the news website that became Business Insider. It's now one of the fastest growing news sites in the world, with 100 million readers and over 300 employees.**

**Henry, thank you for joining me.**

Thank you for having me.

**What an emotional rollercoaster!**

It certainly is! It's always this dramatic, even to hear read!

**Absolutely! Run us through the highs and lows then. How did you get started?**

Well, I started as you said as a freelance journalist and I thought that ultimately I would be a journalist. I worked for a newspaper, and then I worked for television actually, and while I was doing that I decided that the markets were tremendously exciting and I wanted to go into finance. It wasn't completely out of the blue, my family has been in finance for a long time, so I grew up around it, I knew it. And so I went into that and became the equivalent of a journalist on Wall Street as an analyst, and then as you read, had a rather bumpy exit from the industry and went back to journalism. Fortunately I was welcomed back into the industry and have built Business Insider over the last eight years.

**Tell us about the kind of first foray into journalism, then. Did you envisage that you would be a kind of a stringer or a hack in a newsroom? You know, one of about 300 people on that particular floor, churning out copy? What was the original dream?**

The original dream was, I had a romantic notion about being a writer, and I actually spent the first year out of school in Japan, teaching English, doing a lot of reading and reading, I came back, I wrote a book about, sent it off to publishers and quickly had it sent back with notes saying, "We will not be publishing it," and then became a freelancer and worked on a newspaper and magazines and ultimately TV, and I was very interested in the industry. I didn't have a vision ultimately for what I wanted to do with that, but as I said when I was working actually at CNN Business News, was when I really got in fascinated by what was happening on Wall Street, and that ultimately led to the securities industry.

**And what was it about the securities industry that attracted you?**

I had always been around it. One of the legends in my family actually was that a distant relative of mine had been on the trans-Siberian railway during the crash of 1929, and he had been very well-off when he boarded the train, and then he got off the train and he was impoverished, and this was sort of echoing in the family lore for years through my childhood. It wasn't true I don't think, I think it took a lot longer than that!

**It's always the way.**

And my father worked on Wall Street, so I'd grown up around it and it just seemed like a fascinating industry and as it turned out, in the period when I was working on Wall Street it's tremendously fascinating with the whole growth of the Internet was changing everything, and one of the advantages and fortunate things that happened to me was you know that the Internet was new, I had a facility for technology and so I was able to become an expert in that relatively quickly, relative to everybody else and that helped a lot.

**And were you happy to be an observer at that point covering it as a journalist? When did you start to feel that you wanted to get involved and actually dive in yourself?**

Tremendously exciting to see all of these new companies and ideas, and people forming great things, and then companies who were suddenly worth just colossal amounts of money, and actually changing the world, and really that was the thing that was so exciting about it is when you got the Netscape browser for the first time you could just see: this is going to change everything. So it was an incredibly inspiring and exciting time. And given the number of companies that I met with, I had

to think, “Wow, it would be great to go do that.” And actually in the 1990s I had a couple of opportunities where I almost went to smaller companies because it was so exciting. Ultimately didn’t, but then later after going back into journalism and being a consultant for a while, when the opportunity to start the company came along I thought, “Okay, that is something that I have always wanted to do.” And coming out of the 1990s and so it was very exciting to do that.

**I’ve got plenty of questions in terms of what you did next with Business Insider but I just want to dwell just for a few moments if I may about the tough times. Without going into the ins and outs of it, what were the learning outcomes for you?**

Well, it was a tremendously stressful, humiliating experience. I thought that I had done a very good job through the 1990s, it was very easy to get caught up in the hype of that era, I did not really do that fortunately, and that made it easier given what happened. But every time the market crashes in history, it turns out, there is a huge regulatory backlash – and in this case I was right in the centre of the regulatory backlash where they were basically second guessing the relationship between research analyst and investment bankers during the 1990s, and that was a relationship that the securities regulators had said is okay. It was certainly a conflict of interest but it was one that we felt like we could manage, and I certainly don’t blame the regulators for saying, “Hey, maybe it’s too much of a conflict, let’s do things differently.” But having felt like I had operated within the system, to suddenly be blamed for the system itself, was a just an excruciating moment. I didn’t think I would ever work again, I thought my professional life was over, but I felt like I owed it to myself and to my family to try to get up and earn whatever trust I could back over time. And ultimately that’s what led in this direction, and it took several years. I wrote a book, I worked for a whole bunch of newspapers and magazines during that period, did some consulting, and then ultimately led to this. But it was a long process.

**And but without being trite as it were, the true test of a man’s character is not whether he falls down or not, it’s how quickly gets back up and how resolute he is. So it sounds to me that even though you went through some pretty tough times, you didn’t let it keep you down for long.**

Well, it’s interesting you bring up that quote. I don’t remember that from that period, that quote, but the prosecutor who accused me of this – and it was basically, the accusation was that I had said some things in e-mails that were different than what was written in the research – and my argument was we’re not allowed to use language that is so explicit in research reports; you can’t say that, and so that’s why it’s different. But his argument was, “You didn’t say, you said ‘piece of junk’ in an e-mail, and you didn’t say that in the research report, so you’re not being straightforward with the public.” But that prosecutor, Eliot Spitzer, who went on to be

the governor of New York, tremendously successful, had his own huge falling from grace later when he was involved in a prostitution scandal and he had to resign as governor of New York, and one of the things he said in his resignation speech was exactly what you just said, which is Eleanor Roosevelt's quote about it's not whether you get knocked down it's whether you get back up. And I have a weird sort of relationship with Eliot Spitzer. When I got knocked down and started to come back, I started working at a magazine called Slate. After Eliot Spitzer had his scandal, he came back by starting to work at Slate. Eliot Spitzer and I have actually gotten to know each other over the years, and I certainly understand what he has been through as well. So one thing somebody said to me in the middle of all this was, you know, life is long. Take a long view. Just keep putting one foot in front of the other – and that is great advice to anybody in a tough time.

**And has it made you a better entrepreneur, being kind of seared by that experience?**

I think if that had not happened, there's no way Business Insider would have been successful. And there are two particular things that I think are tremendously helpful in building any kind of business. The first is you have to understand that you're going to be criticised and you're going to be misunderstood. And one of the things Jeff Bezos said about Amazon for a while is that you need to be willing to be misunderstood for a long time before people understand it. And so we got a lot of criticism early, some of which was justified, some of the things we tried didn't work, and we made some mistakes on the journalism side and so forth. Those are all learning experiences though. And if you don't know, if you're not willing to go through them and experiment and continue to try to get better, you're very much of a disadvantage; you can't actually discover a new thing. So that's one. And two, just being resilient and being able to find a new way when something doesn't work is critical. And if you look at a lot of the academic studies of success in business and entrepreneurialism, they'll come back to that again and again. They talk about resilience and grit, and it's just a combination of, "Okay, that didn't work. Let's try something new. That didn't work, let's try something else." And ultimately, if you keep doing that and you're lucky, and we had plenty of luck, you find your way to something that supports itself.

**I am an entrepreneur as well, I'm nowhere near as successful as you.**

I would say you're tremendously successful, given the huge audience of this podcast!

**Well there is... well, we get big names in like your good self. But before we kind of get into the details of the journey of setting up Business Insider, do you find that you're less stressed now the bigger and more substantial it is, or**

**has the nature of the kind of stresses and strains changed? So for example, you know, my own personal journey when I had three staff, there was a lot of physically doing the work and it was more about workload whereas now it's more existential stress, although I'm working slightly less the decisions that I take are much more impactful in terms of customers, clients, people's lives. Do you find that it's a different kind of stress but more stressful?**

Well, one of the wonderful things about building a business that grows over time and as successful is that the job is always changing, so you have to learn all the time and if you ever stop that, ultimately you will fail because the company will grow beyond you. And so that has been a very exciting and dynamic process for me and I've had to learn a huge amount over time. I think it's definitely still stressful. The stress is different. For the first five years of the company say, that I woke up terrified every morning because we were doing okay but we usually had enough money to last until the end of the year. We were so tiny that any of the big media companies basically just by rolling over could squish us. We knew that all the time and we knew that there is always a clock every time we raised capital before the sand would run out and we would be done. And so having that pressure all the time is very focusing. You really know that you have to figure your way out and go forward. But there's plenty of stress now, as you grow you have responsibility for so many more people in their lives and jobs and it's such a privilege to be in a leadership position like that. You don't want to let people down, you want to make strong decisions and good decisions. And so it doesn't... the stress is still there. But it's I feel tremendously lucky and I'm so grateful to the team for... they've gotten us here, not me. I've just steered.

**Do you have a mentor? Because many leaders that we talk to say that whilst they're not personally lonely they can be quite professionally lonely. You know, it's almost a cliché to say that it's lonely at the top but as you've just said there being the person at the top that the buck stops with you, being ultimately responsible for the success and failure of and all of the employees that you have. Who do you lean on when you've got some decisions to make in terms of which direction you might take?**

Well, I've always had when I would describe as a personal board of directors and they have been with me for my entire professional life, that started on Wall Street, people I would go to when something happened that I thought it would be great to get an outside perspective on. And when we started the company, I was... the blessing of having very smart partners, and then we had very smart investors, so right, were there, they were very smart people in the room. But I had many other people that I talked to, to say, "Here's the situation. How would you think about handling this?" and so forth. Even today I still rely very much on a lot of other people. It just saying, "Look, here's the situation what we're going through, how would we handle it this way?" A lot of the situations now after 10 years have seen a lot before,

so it gets much easier. It's pattern recognition, we try... okay, we went through that, this is how we handled it... so you do learn things over time but I think mentorship, at the very least, reading books and seeing how other people reading about how other people are handling problems is incredibly important.

**What gets you out of bed in the morning? What's your first thought when you rise, and what time do you get up?**

It ranges.

**I'm always interested in the morning routines of entrepreneurs!**

It used to be very early because I used to write every morning. When we started the company there were three of us writing in the loading dock of another start-up. We had three computers and we were the whole staff. And so if one of us took a break the readership would go down because the production would go down by a third. So I used to get up every morning at five and write as much as I could about the financial markets and then go in and do the business side of things. Now it tends to be a little later, I'll still get up occasionally that early, but what I do immediately is plunge right in with the news every morning. One of the reasons I think the company has stayed so exciting for me is I am a news addict.

**Me too.**

When I was little I would run to the door and get the newspaper in the morning and take it to the breakfast table and spread it out and read all about the sports and everything else, and now it's Twitter which usually is fired up before I get out of bed, so I have a sense of what's going on in the world. Then I open my machine and I get a better sense of what's going on. But that is always the way I start my morning.

**I'm a news junkie as well and I get particularly excited when TV news programmes rebrand and try new music and styles of presentation. My wife accused me recently of having an unhealthy interest in news presentation, which I thought was quite a compliment actually.**

That's right! A lot of it is storytelling.

**Let's go into Business Insider, because I really want to kind of talk through the beginnings of it and kind of go through the whole story. What was the very first moment when you realised that you had something?**

The initial idea for a Business Insider was that we were going to do a digital publication focused on the technology industry for New York. So it was a very focused idea. This was actually an idea that my partner had. The first day we started

writing, our philosophy was this is a new medium, it's going to evolve into something that is fundamentally different from print and TV. If you look at how those evolved, they started out with people thinking they'd be the same and then they became completely different in model and storytelling. So we thought it would be the same in digital, but we didn't know what the storytelling and model would look like. So we said we've got to figure it out. So there is right from the get go, this first day of experimentation, we wrote we thought people would want to read or find helpful. And the first day we realised, "Hey, half the readers are in California. Why are we just focused on New York? This doesn't make sense." So we opened it up to the world of technology. Six months later we were doing very well at that and I said, "Well, you know there's nothing like this in the finance industry, there ought to be something n that," so we started another site that was focused on finance and markets. A year or two later we realised, "Hey, this should just be one big publication. It should be a native digital publication, not a transplanted newspaper, not a transplanted TV network – let's keep exploring digital and build the business publication for the digital generation."

**And that must have been quite an exciting time for you when you realised that you already had some collateral, various brands that you could actually combine and take it forward to the next stage.**

It was exciting that we had lots of people who said, you know, I really like this. This is great. I check it many times a day. I'm addicted to it. I used to hear that again and again. And part of what's so interesting about this industry is, this is in 2007, barely any people on Twitter, Facebook was not a force in media at all. It was all about searching and people coming direct to the site. There was just simply by pulling together stories of the day on a single site you could create a huge amount of value. Of course, over the next last 10 years all of that has now changed and so the model has now changed, video has become huge, images have become huge So the industry is changing all the time, but it was wonderful to hear from some people that hey, you know, I really like what you're doing. That's great. Like, we would have more of that. And it's also... a thing that's great about this industry is you can see to the minute how many people are reading your story, where they're reading it, how they're getting it, whether they're sharing it, not down to an individual name but just in terms of numbers, and for the right kind of writer or journalist that is just so exciting to see, you really want to connect with that. And so that was the thing that really drove us, was this is working, we can make this much bigger and we also have to make it a business too, which is the other side of it, which is big challenge.

**You need to have a culture of agility though, to evolve. You mentioned over the last 10 years. I mean, you know, recent history is littered with Internet companies that have done very well but then have subsequently fallen by the wayside. I'm thinking of like MySpace and some of them that started off very**

**well but then just got taken over. How have you managed to stay agile and actually you know, stay at the forefront of all of this?**

That has been a core value of the company from the beginning, which is that we are always trying to experiment, we are always iterating from the original idea. Good example is what happened in video. We started video about six years ago. Our first concept was something I would describe as bad CNBC; it is, "There's a desk, and at 10 o'clock in the morning we will go live and we'll have an anchor talk to a guest about what's going on in a market and it'll be great!" And we went why the first morning and seven people watched, and five of them were in the newsroom, and we said, "Well it's a start. Let's keep going," and we did it for a couple of weeks and what we realised was first, we could do this forever and we could get better and better and better at it and still we would just be bad see CNBC. CNBC is great at that. Second, there are already excellent financial television networks that are broadcast for free online 24 hours a day and nobody watches them. So that's a good indication that that's actually not what people want in digital and maybe there's a better type of story in format. And so that started us experimenting, we stopped doing the live morning market show, we started doing what I would describe then as Web video, it's much shorter, a lot more graphics intensive. Then ultimately we got very successful at that then Facebook and social video came along, we said, "Great! We know how to do web video." We uploaded our web video onto Facebook and nobody watched it. We said, "Oh my goodness, what's going on here?" And we realised, "Oh! People are watching with sound," first of all, so you have to catch someone's attention without sound – it has to be comprehensible in the first few seconds. Then you have to stop their thumb. They have many exciting things that they can look at. And so we started to change the way we're telling stories there, that really caught on, now we're doing a couple of billion views a month on Facebook and other social platforms, so it really has been from the beginning a constant process of try and then iterate, and try to get better and learn every day.

**How does it work in terms of the relationship with content aggregators like Google, like Facebook, like Twitter, where, as you mentioned a while ago, gone are the days when I would go to Business Insider dot.com and have a look at the website. Usually am referred to stories via my Twitter on Facebook. Usually a colleague or a friend has actually shared that material. You're producing the content but you're also sharing in the revenue with Facebook aren't you? Is it a win-win?**

I think the way to think about it is that Google, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, all the different platforms, they are distributors, the same way that a cable network or a satellite network is a distributor in the analogue world, and we do have a lot of people coming directly to the website. A lot of them started to do that before there were social networks and they built the habit of that, and they're our most direct invaluable and frequent users, which is great. We love to have that. But Facebook is



also tremendously important, so is Twitter, so is LinkedIn, so are all the different platforms.

**I haven't been on your website for years, but I use your app daily.**

That's very nice, we have a big app using community too, and if that's what you really want we'd be very happy to have you there. Some people follow by email. My dad is constantly referring to an e-mail we send out every morning, don't think he goes to the site. but in digital, to be successful, you have to do all of that – and it is really no different than a TV programmer saying, "I've got this great TV programming that I've made. Now I have to partner with distributors in different markets and I'm going to partner with the satellite and the cable company." And there's always this tug of war in each case, like who's the most important? Is it the distributor or the content? The answer is you need both. And all that has to happen for it to work is that there has to be some sharing of economics. And if you look now at Google, we look at traditional media companies that complain about Google aggregation, and we cannot understand what they're talking about.

**It's a huge opportunity.**

It's a huge opportunity. All these people can discover your stories that weren't actually looking for you, they were just looking for a story on a particular topic. Somebody follows us on Facebook, we have a story do very well... we are so grateful to Facebook, they are helping us, and hopefully we are helping them too by providing cool stuff for people on Facebook to look at. They spend more time there, Facebook can make more money. Ultimately it's this symbiosis of distribution and content that makes everything work. And that end... so digital is evolving just the same way that traditional media is evolving, it's just we're in this evolution phase. It is very different that drives a lot of legacy media companies crazy because they don't have the same choke power they used to have, and it's something new that you have to learn and you can't just go out and buy it. And so it's more difficult. But fortunately for us that has created the opportunity for us to exist because we never would have been able to compete if it were about billions of dollars that you can just pay somebody to put the content in front of people's faces.

**Do you have an average reader in your mind? If I said to you now, "Picture an average reader," what would that person be? How would they be, what gender, what lifestyle would they lead, where would they be geographically?**

With Business Insider we are aiming for the next generation of leaders. So these are folks who are in business, they're not just in college. They actually have a job, they're in business, they want to know what's going on in the world, they want to be smarter about what they do in their industry. But for the most part they tend to be 10 to 15 years younger than the generation that grew up reading the Wall Street Journal

and other business publications. And so if you look at our average readers, you find that they are 30 to 35 years old, they're heavily mobile – we have the highest percentage of mobile consumption of any business publication – very global, very digitally savvy, know how to use digital, it's not a compromise, they don't regret giving up the newspaper, they never actually had a newspaper to begin with. That is the idea, that's the core reader and viewer that we are serving. We also as we've gotten bigger have been able to serve people like my father and in fact me, I grew up reading newspapers, I still love newspapers. So there are plenty of us older folks reading now and watching. But the core is basically 30 to 35.

### **Tell us about the business today, then.**

The business today is continuing to evolve. It's growing very rapidly, we are now the largest business publication of any kind in the world, we have about 100 million readers globally. That includes about nine international editions including one or two in a local language like BI Deutschland in German, which is new for us and that should be a big opportunity long term. The main revenue right now is advertising, and that is broken into several different kinds of advertising, some of the standard banners and buttons, sometimes we have big partnerships with major clients. Programmatic is a big piece which is a new model for advertising. We have business development partnerships. So a big range of stuff we call advertising. Subscriptions are increasingly important, and I think will be increasingly important in the medium over time. And in that, that will be very similar actually to traditional media; most traditional media newspapers for example have both these subscription revenue stream and an advertising revenue stream, most cable networks have a subscription revenue stream with affiliate fees and advertising. So as this medium develops and we start moving toward two revenue streams, actually again it's resembling the evolution of traditional media. So we think over time, subscriptions will become more and more important, it's growing faster than advertising for us, and especially in a category like this which is business and professional, we find people are very willing to pay for stories and...

### **Quality journalism.**

Quality journalism, and journalism that helps them do their job better, and information along those lines. And so we feel like that's a great opportunity.

**It's one of the reasons why I don't use an ad blocking software. Because if you have a website you've got to pay your journalists decent money, so you need advertising revenue.**

You are unusual if you understand that based on the notes that I have been getting from Adblock users since we have started to ask Adblock users to unblock for the site, and the tone in some of those notes is startling to me in the idea that, you know,

“Hey, I don’t care, it’s not my problem, you need to figure out something else,” which people are entirely entitled to have that attitude, that’s fine, I understand if people don’t want to see advertising, but I think it’s reasonable for a publication to say, “We have 200 journalists. They need to eat.”

### **They have mortgages.**

Exactly. We have to have some way of compensating them. If you don’t want to see ads that’s totally fine, but there are other sites that you can read. Or, in our case, we also launched a subscription with no ads and it is great for people who don’t like ads. It’s super fast, it’s super light, it’s on your phone, it doesn’t chew up any data, it’s right there, it’s a great value relative to a lot of other business publications out there. So I also have great conversations where I urge those who say, “I will now turn off my ad blocker,” I say, “Well then, try the subscription, it’s a great value.”

**Do you think there is a little bit of a kind of race to the bottom where traditional media is trying to find different ways of making paywalls work, subscription models, certain types of advertising, all these kind of hybrid models. No one seems to have got the answer that’s quite right for them. Everyone’s trying so many different ways to try and make this work.**

What leads the race to the bottom, I think it is a race to figure out what ultimately will work in this medium. And one of the reasons that it’s so chaotic and there’s so much experimentation, is really the Internet has arisen among all three of the major media – radio, television and print – and every traditional provider in each one of those media has a digital site, and now they are all competing for digital. And the advantage that we’ve had, and again one of the few things that has made us have an opportunity to survive, is that by focusing 100% of our energy on that, we’ve been able to figure out a model that works – and that has been more difficult for companies that at the same time have to produce a world class newspaper, which is incredibly difficult, or produce 24 hours of great television programming, which is very difficult. If we had to do that we’d have failed in 20 minutes. Digital is that hard that it takes the full attention. I think there is a lot of experimentation going on. I think a few companies have figured out good, sustainable models and will continue to grow. I don’t think there is one right answer, there often tends to be when somebody comes out with a new model, people say, “Is that it? What we’ve all been doing for 20 years is wrong?” It’s not about right or wrong, it’s just about figuring out a model that works, that sustains the kind of newsroom and media that you want to have and give to your readers and viewers.

**I think one of the things that Business Insider does very well is – and I’m not just saying this to flatter you – it has genuinely world class excellent content, but it also leverages it well. I often feel... I don’t like click bait if I feel misled,**

**but I don't consider it click bait if something's got proactively on my radar in some way and I can see self evidently that's a good piece of content, then I want to click on it, in which case I think that person has done me a favour and then click on it and read it.**

That's right, and I think that's one of the things that a lot of critics of the industry missed for the first few years, was, "Hey, you know, this story sounds exciting but it actually is based on information unearthed by this other company; that somehow doesn't seem fair," whereas my argument would be, "Actually, yes, it is important to surface the information, and we do tons of that, we do tons of original reporting and we surface a lot of information, but it is also very important to package it in a way that explains why it is compelling, and then to distribute it in a way that it gets in front of you at the time that you might be interested in it, with your specific interest base, and that all of those things are difficult." And so I do actually think one of the values that a lot of the great digital media companies help with is that they do... they can explain why something is so compelling. It's not just that something happened, but it's, "This happened. What does it mean? Why is it important?" and ultimately packaging that into a very short communication that, just as you said, gets your attention. That you read and, then very importantly, makes you glad that you read it, and wanting to share it. There is nothing worse than someone feeling tricked into clicking. All that does is destroy your brand value. No one will share it. You don't get any additional.

### **Not in your interests.**

That's right. What you want to do is say, "Hey, here's this great story," and you read it and say, "Hey, that's a great story – so great I want to share with my friends," and you share it. And then thousands of other people read it and they share it. That's the way you succeed.

### **But it's only what newspapers do with their front page. The reality the front pages is it's designed to attract and engender attention pleas by this newspaper.**

That is right, and hopefully there's a lot of art in that too. The craft of the front page and all that is very important, it's one of the things that I still love about certain newspapers is the joy they take in crafting the front page and the splash. The answer is yes, it is exactly that way in digital, and it is down to the story level. When you create a magazine, if somebody is subscribing to the magazine or buying a magazine, it almost doesn't matter what happens inside the magazine because the article has been included. Maybe you'll read it, maybe you won't – it doesn't matter. But in digital, all articles and videos and audio are going to travel not just in the package of publication, but on their own. And they have to attract an audience and get shared *on their own*. And so it is a different craft of packaging the story with the

headline and the picture or the headline and the particular video image, all that goes into the craft and that's what actually separates the newsrooms that are good at it from newsrooms that are not.

**Do you feel a sense of responsibility given that you are one of the biggest global media brands now, in terms of almost editorially? You would think of the New York Times, the BBC, Business Insider is getting up there now as an incredibly influential global media operator.**

Absolutely. And we have, over the years, as our influence and readership has grown, put more and more time into exactly that. It's making sure that what we're saying is accurate, that the reporting is strong, that we are serving our readers and not creating something that will be misconstrued, and it's something that in the early days when we didn't have the experience that we have, things would happen for example, where something would be circulated on social media and it might get reported as fact even if it wasn't, or it was a hoax or what have you, we fell for a lot of those things eight years ago.

**We all did.**

But we got smart about it faster than a lot of other publications. And I think now most publications are very wise to it, having fallen for it again and again. But I think that our credibility is tremendously important to us. And we are... increasingly, the mission of the company is just get better every day and that is journalistically, but also reputationally, serving our readers and viewers, we want to continue to do that.

**What global media brands do you admire? Do you follow their CEOs and see what he or she's doing? And if I could to kind of indulge you, what organisations do you think haven't got it, you know, have missed it? Where you... whatever they do, you think they probably got it wrong anyway.**

Well I love a lot of media organisations for different reasons. When we started Business Insider, there were some digital native publications that I looked to and said, "These folks have figured something out, and so let's learn from what they're doing." They included Drudge, the Drudge Report, couldn't be more simple. Basically editorialised headlines on top of other stories and links; Huffington Post, short posts, blogs; Gawker Media, news style; they had it all figured out something and ultimately we evolved into a hybrid of them. In traditional business media, love The Economist, love a lot of what Bloomberg does, love a lot of what Wall Street Journal does, we aspire to all of that. And don't aspire to recreate what they have because it's in different media. We do not want to be a world-class newspaper company, it's tremendously difficult. We could never do that. We want to be as influential in digital as The Wall Street Journal and built from the ground up with the digital generation. And so I continually learn from what The Wall Street Journal does and how they do

it, and then we try to take that and use the digital equivalent of that, whatever it happens to be.. Television, there are so many great television producers and you can learn wonderful things from each one of them, and then in digital video, which is a relatively newer thing for us, it's only six or seven years old, they're just tremendously talented producers of digital video, web video and social video. Our team is developed into one of the leading teams for social video for example, on Facebook and elsewhere. It is a new kind of story. We learn all the time from what other great digital publishers are doing, how to tell stories in a minute. How do you do it without sound? How do you do it with sound optional and make it better? All that is a learning experience every day, and there are wonderful folks out there in media. And one of the great things about media is something that Jeff Bezos, who invested in the company relatively early on, always said, he saw it as a similarity between media and commerce, which is that in a lot of technology businesses, it's a winner take all game. Seventeen twitters are born at the same time, in the end one survives. In media and commerce it's different; it's not winner take all. It is a... there are always going to be dozens of companies. It's really about share. Can you continue to gain a little bit of share every year. And so that's what we try to do. We're not trying to destroy anybody else, we are trying to work from everybody else and continue to get better.

**What's a typical week for you? If I ever become as successful as you now get to become a media behemoth...**

Haha.

**Do you get the best tickets to the opera? Is the president on the phone trying to get your ear? How does it actually work?**

Well first, I can't tell you how long it took us to get to 250,000 readers. That was *years* into what we're doing. So you're well on your way! I don't recall ever being offered tickets to some fabulous event by a president or anything like that. The better we get known, and the more people realise how many people our stories reach, and the quality of the people that our stories reach, the easier it becomes for us to do interviews and get interviews and so forth. We have interviewed both presidential candidates in the US, for example, it's exciting and in both cases that's something that a few years ago we couldn't even have dreamed of doing. It's great to be involved in that, and in both cases we were able to reach an audience that they would not have reached on traditional media, either in print or in digital. So as the reputation and readership of the publication grows, that that part gets easier. My life, I couldn't be more boring I'm afraid.

**That's what all the exciting people say!**

I like to spend my evenings with my family. I find, again, the news industry just endlessly fascinating, so a lot of my entertainment comes from my phone, reading Business Insider.

**Yes, I like that particular reference! Well, what are going to do then, over the next couple of years? Where are you going to take Business Insider?**

I think that digital media is at a similar place as the cable network industry was in the early 1990s, which means that it's about 10 years into the birth of this new kind of media company and network. We've proven the concept by now, and now it is about continuing to get better and perfecting it over time. And if you go back to 1990 for example, CNN was about nine years old, it was starting to be known. But it wasn't until the first Gulf War that CNN became a household name, and then over the next 20 years it became this huge global network. I think that the surviving digital media companies will go on for the same thing. I think it will be another 10, 20, 30, 40 years. The brands will continue to grow, they'll continue to get better, at the same time a lot of traditional media companies will come under increasing pressure. In the United States in the last couple of months, the newspaper industry has come under intense pressure where the decline in print advertising has really accelerated. And so a lot of the big publications are suddenly really saying, "Wow, we really need to focus on digital," and the television industry is now starting to be hit. It has been impervious to everything that's been happening for a long time, but viewership is starting to move. So over the next 20 years there will be a big reconstruction of the TV industry. And so our mission...

**So there'll be fewer newspapers and fewer TV channels?**

Yes. But there will be more media than there has ever been. And there will be amazing newsrooms created in part by people who are leaving some of the print publications, will come to successful digital publications, and the same on the TV side, although there's plenty of room in television, there's so much money in that industry that they will be in great shape for a long time. But this is a golden age for journalism, and this is the most... the richest and most powerful medium that's ever been invented. You can use words, pictures, video, infographics – anything you can use to tell the story in the best way possible; you can reach any person on earth with a click. There's never been a medium like that. And so we are in a golden age, and I think that the digital media companies that understand that continue to grow little by little every year for decades. And so our mission internally is 'get better every day'. It is about the opportunity; it's not going to happen overnight, but if we continue to take small steps, eventually we're going to get somewhere really cool.

**The less glamorous areas of journalism seem to be suffering around it, in terms of they developed western economies. I'm thinking of local journalism,**

**you know, the town newspaper that even 20 years ago would have maybe 15, 20 journalists in the newsroom and now struggles with maybe one or two. And I wonder whether a kind of local governments are being sufficiently held to account because of that. And then the other thing is investigative journalism, you know, long form journalism that can, you know, you might put three of your journalists under cover for a year on something and have to pay their salaries, and they might not come up with anything because they might look into something and find out that it actually is legit. So in a sense do you have any thoughts on where journalism is going generally, because it cannot solely just focus on the profitable stuff.**

Yes, so I think that, stepping back, the world is vastly better informed than it was 10 years ago and that it has ever been in the past. So in terms of journalism's role in that, it is changing now that there are social platforms, and now that anybody on earth is a click away, and anybody can publish anything to a social network or a site, a lot of that is filling the role that journalists used to play – and I don't mean that they're writing great news stories, but they are getting information out into the public. So journalists are now having to work with that and that is actually material and sourcing in a lot of cases, and sometimes you do the background research and a particular piece of information that has appeared that everyone is taking seriously and you debunk it, but it's changing the role of journalism. Journalism itself on a national level is doing just fine. The New York Times for example, a great US newspaper, even if they close the newspaper tomorrow they would have a very big, vibrant digital business that would be doing just fine.

**We had Mark Thompson, the chief executive of The New York Times, on this podcast.**

Yes. TV is doing just fine, radio is doing just fine, and a lot of digital companies are doing just fine, so from a news perspective we're in great shape. You did say local, which is one area where there definitely is a challenge...

**Because there's no money in it, is there?**

The business problem has not yet been figured out. I think it will get figured out. I think there continues to be a lot of experiments around that, and I think that one of the insights is likely to be that you have to have a subscription on a local paper, and for a decade or more everyone in the newspaper industry believe it's got to be free or it'll disappear. Turns out people are actually very willing to pay for information they like and value. And so I think that will develop on a local basis, and I think that there will be new advertising solutions that work on a local basis. And I think that a lot of what people used to get from their local newspaper will now be provided by other providers. And that's okay. The world will still be very well informed, we will still get the information that we want. It will just be provided for by a different party or paid for



differently. So I think actually local is one of the most exciting areas, and if I was going to start a new company, that would be one area I would jump right into.

**What do you think of yourself as, first and foremost? I work with a bank in the UK, Metro Bank, and Vernon Hill would say that he's in retail, he wouldn't say he's in banking. I know some other banking companies that say they're a technology company. Do you think of yourself as entrepreneur or as a journalist and editor? How does that actually fit into your worldview now?**

For me, I consider myself an entrepreneurial journalist. I think business is fascinating, but I'm not going to go start a hotel or a restaurant or some kind of technology company. This is the kind of product and service that I want to produce, which is nonfiction journalism. We at Business Insider last year actually started a lifestyle brand which is a different brand called Insider. It is aimed at a younger demographic and it is all about travel and food and adventure and all those things. I love those too, I'm not just a business journalist, and I'm tremendously excited about what Insider has done. But I'm not also going to go into some business, I'm not just an entrepreneur who is going to go on different things. So I'm in the right industry. There are lots of problems and challenges still to solve in the industry, so hopefully over the next 10 or 20 years, however long I have left, I'll be able to tackle some of the other problems as well.

**Where do you get your best ideas? Some people we speak to say it's in the shower, some people say they go on long bike rides... because I mean, it is one of the challenges that entrepreneurs have is you're inundated with Slack notifications, tweets, inbound emails – you've got to be across so much. Sometimes I find that being on the plane is the only time I can actually think of ideas.**

It's a good point. You have to step back from what is going on and remind yourself of what's actually important, because especially in the news business it's tremendously easy to get distracted by the latest story, and pretty soon months will have gone by and you haven't planned or looked ahead at all. The shower is very helpful! Other things, I run occasionally. My mind is usually working while I'm running. Planes are good, although I try not to travel as much unless I have to do it. But I think the idea of what you've identified, just stepping back continually and saying what's really important is very important. And for us, what is really important is spotting and telling great stories. There are millions of stories that could be told every day. The only way we can survive and serve our readers and viewers is by choosing stories that we think are compelling and then telling them very well. And if we do that well we're in great shape, if we do it badly we're toast.

**Do you ever switch off? What do you actually do for fun. I like to do it with my wife, because I always said that if she left me, which one of my worst fears would be, if I then went on an online dating website and had to list my hobbies, I would be incredibly dull because I don't have any.**

I do play tennis occasionally, which is good, I like that. I like sports a lot, but my wife would tell you that it is exactly the same. One of the things she realised she had to live with very early on was my inability to switch off, and back in the early days of Silicon Alley Insider when we started the company, one of the things that she said to me was, "You know when I realised that you are actually doing the thing that you were born to do?" and I said, "No, what was that?" And she said, "When I heard you all laughing at a story that you had written at five o'clock in the morning. I hear your laughter coming upstairs at some sentence you have written and you've published to the world, and I thought: 'He's doing what he was meant to be doing.'" And I'm afraid it may not even be funny, but I was amused myself in that moment, so it's hard to unplug. This is what I love.

**Well, and this is what I love. Henry, it's been a huge honour for you to make the time to talk to us. Thank you ever so much.**

Thank you and congratulations on your success it's amazing.