



IndieCreator: Insights from a Newbie Comic Creator & Other Industry Pros

This is a series of bi-weekly columns by Bob Heske @ Heske Horror, creator of [The Night Projectionist](#) and [Cold Blooded Chillers](#), featuring interviews and insights from indie comic artists, writers, creators, distributors and visionaries.

10 Questions with Jeff Olweean @ Zaldiva Comics & Collectibles

From Cigar Czar and eBay PowerSeller to Comic Collectible King, entrepreneur Jeff Olweean is flexing his muscles and spreading his wings to transform Zaldiva into “The Next Big Thing” in indie comics. With the first of many brick and mortar stores in Fort Lauderdale, Florida and an expanding web presence, get ready comic & collectible geeks – Zaldiva is about to rock your world...

1. What is Zaldiva, and what is your growth plan?

(JEFF:) Zaldiva started as a cigar company in 1996 with very high-end clientele. We diversified into web design solutions and collectibles in 1999. Eventually we sold the web design part of the business, and focused on two key areas: as an eBay PowerSeller and comic collectibles distributor. Our goal is to acquire five more stores in the Florida market in the next 6-9 months, and buy another 10 stores in key markets such as New England and New York in 2010 and 2011. We may also acquire one or two comic conventions to build our brand, and large pawn shops which complement our eBay PowerSeller business. Aside from being in acquisition mode, we will also delve heavily into the web with social websites such as MySpace, Facebook and Twitter.



2. You recently signed a partnership with InvestComics. How does that fit into The Plan?

(JEFF:) Zaldiva formed a joint venture with InvestComics to help both companies leverage the web to build market share and brand awareness in the comic and collectibles industry. InvestComics is unique in that it sees comics much like we do – as a growth entertainment industry with a ton of upside.

Others media giants agree as is evident with the \$4 billion purchase of Marvel Comics by Disney. Disney plans to put Marvel's 5,000 characters to work on its television channels and in video games, theme parks and movies. And in September Warner Brothers announced the creation of DC Entertainment – an extension of its DC comic subsidiary – which will focus on converting DC's comic book cachet into box office bucks.

This is a proven formula when you consider that 10 of the top 10 grossing films in 2008 were animation (*WALL-E*, *Kung Fu Panda*, *Madagascar: Escape to Africa*, *Horton Hears a Who*) or based on graphic novels or super heroes (headed by the #1-2 punch of *The Dark Knight* and *Iron Man*, and including *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, *Hancock*, *Twilight* and James Bond's *Quantum of Solace*). And that's not counting the re-make of the *Incredible Hulk* which came in at #17.



What attracted me to InvestComics was that Jay Katz (founder and owner of InvestComics) continually demonstrated a keen eye to spot the true collectible gems out of the hundreds of thousands of comic titles available today. Now that Jay has branched out to write for *Project FanBoy* and *ComicNews.info*, he is building a fan base who will read him regularly and follow his recommendations. The joint venture will focus on directing collectors to www.Zaldiva.com for their comic book investments. Zaldiva will be the prime comic book carrier for InvestComics. A collector will be directed to Zaldiva to build on their portfolio, or for any other comic book paraphernalia that they may need.

3. *I noticed Zaldiva is a public company. How's the stock doing?*



(JEFF) Yes, Zaldiva is sold on the "Over the Counter"(OTC) Bulletin Board with the stock ticker symbol "ZLDV." It's also available on the Xetra/Frankfurt Exchange under the ticker "UZ8." Right now I believe we are extremely undervalued as our stock price is less than the total assets of our Fort Lauderdale store and inventory. When you consider that the bigger book stores like Amazon, Barnes and Noble and Borders have PE's of 17 or more, we are a bargain.

4. *So even though lately your stock wavers between \$0.06 and \$0.08 you'd rate it a "BUY."*

(JEFF) I'm Zaldiva's largest shareholder, and I am holding on for the ride. And I'm not alone. In May, Street Research Analyst Nguyen Thi Ngoc Suong rated Zaldiva with a 'Venture Buy' rating and a price target of \$1.02. In his report (available at <http://www.streetresearch.com/w/latest-reports/zaldiva-inc-may-2009>), Mr. Suong wrote that: "Zaldiva represents a unique ground floor investment opportunity for those who can afford the risk and hold onto their position until the new phase of growth reveal better performance."

Consider this: According to retail analysis site ICv2, sales of graphic novels in the U.S. and Canada rose from \$75 million in 2001 to \$375 million in 2007. That's 500% growth. Zaldiva, with its unique combination of a highly visible brick-and-mortar location in Florida (and more stores to come), its e-commerce site and one of the most successful eBay storefronts, is expected to become a heavyweight in this rapidly growing market.

As we unveil our growth plan and aggressively acquire new stores and companies in the next 12-18 months, I think you'll continue to see analyst 'Buy' recommendations.



5. *Any plans for acquiring comic publishers like Disney and Warner?*

(JEFF) Definitely, we're always searching. We have our eyes open both in the US and overseas. In investment parlay, we are focusing on the "emerging market" picks within the comic publisher industry. To quantify the term "emerging," I am referring to those indie comic publishing houses that have put out impressive titles in the past few years and who have demonstrated an ability to build a loyal subscriber fan base. That's all I can say for right now, but I expect you will see one or more press releases in 2010 about Zaldiva either partnering with or acquiring some quality comic publishers as wholly owned subsidiaries. These deals would most likely be a mix of cash and stock deals – much like Disney did with Marvel.

6. *With a tough economy and the spectre of inflation ahead, how do you plan to be able to fund all of this activity?*

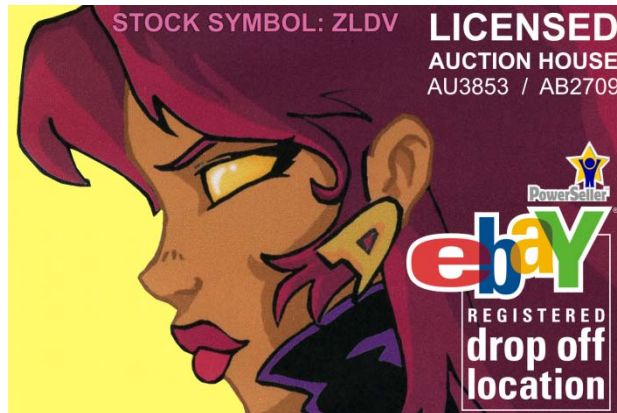
(JEFF) There are many factors working in our favor. Our Board at Zaldiva have assets to fund much of the activity today, and we are building a powerful venture capital team from past business dealings. Many financiers are energized by the recent Disney/Marvel deal and feel the long-view of this industry is rock solid. Using storefronts and social web marketing to build the brand and grow our subscriber base will also fuel sales, assets and eventually, the PE and stock price.

We also have a strong foothold as an eBay PowerSeller which comprises roughly half our our business. We will roll out this business model as we acquire new stores, collectible dealers, and even select pawn shops.

We are also assembling an Advisory Board with a great eye for quality product. This will help us not only sell, but own licensing rights for comic titles that parlay into the game, video and movie industries as well.

7. *Let's get back to the eBay PowerSeller aspect of Zaldiva. You've done very well with it. How did it become such a big part of your business model?*

(JEFF) It was a natural course of events when we opened our Fort Lauderdale store. We're situated in a high traffic area. Roughly 65,000 cars go by daily. Because we sell collectibles as well as comics, we were getting people stopping by with things they pulled from their attics and wanted to sell. We couldn't carry all that extra inventory, but we didn't want to lose the customers. So we became



an eBay registered dropoff location which has really been a boon to our business. Now we have more people coming into the store who would not have stopped by otherwise – people who come to us to drop off things to sell on eBay, who see all the cool things we have in the store on display, and who end up either walking out with some comics or memorabilia, or referring other customers to us. It's really been fantastic: we've helped people sell their goods and make a buck, and we've met some great repeat customers.

8. *You've been aggressive at building your online presence. Aside from the InvestComics joint venture deal, what else have you been working on?*

(JEFF) We've been very focused on increasing our social media exposure to increase Zaldiva brand recognition and, ultimately, revenues. We know that in this Digital Age

customers don't just like to receive information, they want a means to provide input – and that's what we plan to provide. Facebook alone has over 200 million users so it makes sense to reach out to these people and speak to them where they are living online. The core of our social media marketing plan includes a blog, interactive YouTube channel, Facebook Fan Page, MySpace business listing and a Twitter account. We expect a lot of customer participation and feedback, and we ultimately hope to make our Zaldiva website a hub for the comic & collectible community.

We've recently revamped our website, but that is just the first of many steps to improve our website design and functionality to provide a better user experience. Currently, we average 1,500 unique site visits per day and 25,000 total hits daily. We're going to put as much energy into growing website traffic as in building revenues, because our business philosophy is that both strategies go hand-in-hand.

Through a combination of blogs, member boards, podcasts and conventions, we hope to attract a wide audience – keep them entertained, informed, and coming back. As we continue to build strategic partnerships and expand with business acquisitions, we hope to achieve greater and greater success with our subscriber base.

9. *Any plans to grow your brand overseas?*

(JEFF) Definitely. Zaldiva companies currently sell to 33 countries and we are currently traded on the Frankfurt Exchange. The Internet will be key to making Zaldiva a global brand and Pop culture comic & collectible distributor.

10. *Last question – what does a successful entrepreneur like yourself collect?*

(JEFF) I collect vintage and oddball stuff ... Coca-Cola memorabilia, the Simpsons, Batman, Beavis and Butthead, South Park, and some coins. That's another reason for becoming an eBay PowerSeller. Otherwise I'd end up buying a lot of the stuff for myself!

Thank you, Jeff. For more information about Zaldiva and its related enterprises, go to www.zaldiva.com or www.jeffolwean.com.

Bob Heske is creator of [The Night Projectionist](#), a vampire OGN by publisher [Studio 407](#) with film rights optioned by [Myriad Pictures](#). Through his Heske Horror shingle, Bob self-published his critically acclaimed horror series [Cold Blooded Chillers](#). Bob's trade paperback [Bone Chiller](#) (a "best of" CBC anthology) won a Bronze medal in the horror category at the 2009 Independent Publisher Book Awards. He will release a much anticipated Doomsday anthology called "2012: Final Prayer" on 11/15/09. Email Bob at info@coldbloodedchillers.com.