

power player (People in the know who you ought to know)



Dan Mallin, managing director, SDWA Ventures

What's the Big Idea?

That's what Dan Mallin wants to know

BY Nanci Crotti PHOTO Silas Crews

Don't call Dan Mallin a venture *capitalist*. Venture *catalyst* would suit him better. That's because Mallin is an idea man, a strategic thinker who, at 41, has already bought, sold or helped develop more than 20 companies. He and partner Scott Litman are currently managing directors of SDWA Ventures, LLC, Minneapolis, which provides strategy and advice to entrepreneurs.

SDWA typically receives a minor share of equity in each company in exchange for its services. Its client list ranges from the luxury destination club The LUSSO Collection [Cover, March] to an environmentally sensitive dry cleaner. To capture Mallin's interest, a company has to make a splash.

"What we're looking for is big changes; things that are 10 times better, 10 times cheaper, that make a change," he says.

Mallin founded a video production company in elementary school and produced a cable TV program while in high school. Following graduation from Drake University, he spent 10 years in technology and marketing at 3M, where he helped launch 3M.com.

Separately, he formed Oatmeal Media, an Internet consulting company. Litman's company,

POWER PLAYER

Dan Mallin

Title: Managing director, SDWA Ventures LLC

Age: 41

Hometown: Milwaukee, Wis.

Education: BS/BA, Drake University; MBA, University of Minnesota-Carlson School of Management

Directorships: SDWA Ventures, LLC, ARAnet Inc., Spot Buy Spot, LLC, IntelAccount Inc., PICC STAT LLC, American Institute of Project Management LLC, GetGo Development, LLC, Minnesota Cup, Minnesotans' Military Appreciation Fund.

Family: Wife Deborah, sons, Benjamin, 12, Elliott, 9, and Jeremy, 6.

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Imaginet, Inc., completed the back-end construction work for Oatmeal's clients on the emerging World Wide Web.

In 1997, 3M's Imation bought Imaginet, Inc., which had merged with Oatmeal Media. Two years later, Mallin and Litman partnered with Skip Gage to buy Imaginet back from Imation. "We exited with a staff and no revenue and grew, year one, to \$4.5 million in revenue and the following year to \$15 million and then grew to annual revenue of \$85 million after which we sold it to J. Walter Thompson," Mallin says.

Mallin and Litman then started the Minnesota Cup competition offering entrepreneurs the chance to have their business ideas heard, since "getting found is a big part of succeeding" in their minds.

The contest attracted more than 1,250 entrants in the first two years, including PICC STAT; a medical services company that has since joined SDWA's stable.

"Through the interactions from lots of

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—Dan Mallin

these people, we've learned that Minnesota has a great set of resources to help get companies going," Mallin adds. "Most people don't have any idea how to find them."

So this year Mallin and Litman, along with Tom Kieffer, co-founded a website called GetGo.com to help the entrepreneurial and investment communities find each other. The well-trafficked site has nearly 1,800 users who've created personal identities and 582 networks, including professional service providers,

investors and board members.

"It's a tool to help everybody work together. It's post-finding money that it can help you so much," Mallin says.

Mallin has been a huge help to college friend Joy Baer, CEO of Spot Buy Spot, LLC, a Chicago company that develops software for advertising agencies and advertisers. "He is a natural born leader so he really takes a lot of personal responsibility for people and what they're doing and it spreads out through business and through his personal life," says Baer.

He's also a family man; a father of three sons who enjoys the outdoors. "For a guy who is as comfortable in Manhattan as Minneapolis and otherwise very worldly, Dan is happiest when he's out at the lake and enjoying the peace and quiet of just being with his family," says Litman. "His lake place is called The Log Off. And he logs off." **MB**

Nancy Crotti is a frequent contributor to *MinnesotaBusiness Magazine*.



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