



## **Steven Gigliotti: Home Is Where the Money Is**

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### **Ad-man Gigliotti sells the dream of Scripps' lifestyle networks**

*By Brent Felgner -- Broadcasting & Cable, 2/4/2008*

Steve Gigliotti, executive VP of ad sales and emerging media for Scripps Networks, learned the carrot-and-stick lessons of selling ad time even before his career began in earnest. While still a student at Villanova University, he became a campus radio personality and was enthralled by live sports broadcasting and play-by-play.



"But the only way I was allowed to do play-by-play was to go out and find advertisers," he remembers. "I learned early that if I didn't sell anything, I couldn't go with the [basketball] team on the road."

That lesson has served him well over a 35-year career that has brought him to Scripps, where he has helped the company quadruple its revenue in the last seven years, from \$300 million to \$1.2 billion, increasing 13% last year. Scripps Networks accounted for nearly half of the year's total revenue for its parent, E.W. Scripps Co., which will split into two companies later in 2008, dividing old media and new into separate businesses.

E.W. Scripps will hold on to 17 newspapers and 10 broadcast TV properties. Gigliotti's piece will be Scripps Networks Interactive; encompassing a projected \$1.4 billion operation with lifestyle networks HGTV, Food Network, DIY Network, Fine Living Television and music channel Great American Country. The business will also include the Shopzilla and uSwitch shopping services, and all of the properties' associated Websites.

The separation will free the enterprise to more fully realize its value and go on an acquisition tear, released from the shackles of declining print businesses and legacy broadcast operations. The push to grow is apparent; in the last year, the company has picked up sites such as Recipezaar, and launched real estate portal Frontdoor.com as well as social-networking salon RedBlueAmerica.

While his formal role in the new business is still developing, Gigliotti says it's clear he'll continue to be the guy in charge of bringing in the money. In a new company with relatively low debt (about \$300 million post-split), lots of cash and outstanding segment margins (51%), it's not a bad place to be.

"We want to own those categories, and we have a great jumping-off platform to be able to aggregate content so that when people want an answer about food or about home, we're the portal. We have work to do there," he offers.

And despite an economy on the precipice of recession with a home marketplace at a 12-year low, Gigliotti publicly exudes confidence that those threats will be short-lived. And for now, at least, sales have held up, buttressed by the largest advertisers. Just the same, he's planning contingencies for the scenario that keeps him up at night: a full-blown recession that lasts more than just a quarter or two. But his focus remains fixed on the potential, and he brought that zeal with him to last week's four-day sales meeting in Nashville.

"This is a new frontier, and the speed of change is breathtaking," he offers.

Born in Rochester, N.Y., Gigliotti grew up in Philadelphia. He finished college at night at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton Evening School, where he earned an undergrad degree in marketing, selling ad time during the day at WMMR, then the Metromedia rock station. He moved on to CBS-owned WCAU radio and also broke into TV sales there.

Pushed to New York, he sold for all five CBS television stations and then moved over to the network's flagship, WCBS, first as local sales manager then as general sales manager, before being lured to KCBS in Los Angeles.

"It was unforgiving—I still have the scars," Gigliotti quips. "But I had the best possible education."

Gigliotti's move to L.A. would be a test of his management skills. He was recruited by one of the two people who have had the greatest influence on his career, former newsman Frank Gardner, who had just been promoted to general manager. Under orders to clean house, Gardner told Gigliotti to start from scratch.

"He said, 'Look, I've got to fix the news and programming, so go fix the sales department and call me if you need me,'" Gigliotti remembers. "That was the beginning of a great friendship and business relationship—a lifelong one."

After Gardner moved on and after another general manager came and went, Gigliotti finally made the leap to management, becoming general manager of KCBS, in what he characterizes as the most difficult marketplace in the country.

In 1993, after eight years in L.A., he moved to Sacramento for an equity stake and the general manager's spot at KOVR. After nearly three years spent gaining new audience share, owner River City merged with Smith Broadcasting. As the transaction closed, Gigliotti received a career-altering phone call.

Gardner, now head of the station group at Scripps, was on the other end, offering him the general manager's job at any of three stations in the group—a pair of No. 1's in their markets and at WMAR-TV in Baltimore, what Gigliotti would describe to his wife, Sharon, as "No. 7 in a four-station market."

A native of the Chesapeake Bay area, Sharon instantly voted to have the couple's two sons grow up there, too. The deal was done, but Gigliotti maintains that the challenge was a factor, too.

"If you give me a station that's No. 1, I start worrying about making a mistake," he explains. "But this station needed to be connected to a marketplace."

He began to reach out, first in local sports programming, then to city neighborhoods through twice-monthly meetings. "We began to build some equity in the marketplace," he says. Ratings were tougher, though the station improved some and cleaned up its balance sheet.

In 2000, Gardner was again on the other end of the phone, pressing Gigliotti to sit down with recently promoted E.W. Scripps CEO Ken Lowe about taking over Scripps Networks' sales efforts. It wasn't Gigliotti's first meeting with Lowe—he had declined an earlier offer to work for HGTV, which Lowe was launching.

“I had the good sense not to turn him down twice,” Gigliotti says. “Ken is the other part of the dynamic duo I became enamored with when I came [here].”

Scripps Networks Interactive is poised to go out and get bigger—in its existing lifestyle space and beyond. Says Gigliotti, “We’re not afraid to go out and do something different.”

To see a gallery of Fifth Estater caricatures, [click here](#).

***Steven J. Gigliotti***

**Title:** Executive VP, Ad Sales and Emerging Media, Scripps Networks

**Education:** B.A., Univ. of Pennsylvania, Wharton Evening School, 1980

**Employment:** WMMR Phila., acct. exec, 1974-1976; WCAU Phila., acct. exec, 1976-1978; WCAU-TV, Phila., 1978-1981; CBS Spot Sales, New York, 1981-1983; WCBS-TV New York, local sales mgr, gen. sales mgr., 1983-1985; KCBS-TV Los Angeles, dir. of sales, station mgr, gen. mgr., 1985-1993; KOVR-TV Sacramento, gen. mgr., 1993-1996; WMAR-TV Baltimore, VP/gen. mgr., 1996-2000; Scripps Networks, senior VP, ad sales and emerging media, 2000-2003; current position since 2003