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Informational Interview with Eric Obenauf

Eric Obeanuf is the co- founder and CEO of Two Dollar Radio, which is based in Columbus. Mr. Obenauf began the company in 2005 with his wife, Eliza, and they currently work out of their house. Two Dollar Radio is an independent publishing company, but recently has also explored the areas of film. One of their published books, *I Smile Back*, was newly adapted into a movie starring Sarah Silverman, and shown at the Sundance film festival. This past summer, the company itself produced a movie called “*I am Not Patrick”*. Both Eric and Eliza were profiled as part of Publisher’s Weekly 50 under 40 series, while also being credited by The Brooklyn Rail as publishing “some of the finest work of contemporary fiction.” They have also been recognized by many others such as Publishing Perspective, and HTML Giants. I was interested in interviewing them because I am interested in the field of publishing, but do not know much about it. And I know even less about independent publishing.

When I asked how Mr. Obenauf chose his line of work, he said he felt that it was necessary. He was a dramatic writing major at NYU and after college had been writing screenplays and children’s books. But he felt as if certain types works were not fulfilled by the big publishing companies, and that those companies had too much power. Roughly five publishers were publishing 80% of books. He felt that it was a good time for independent publishers. After living in San Diego, and New York, Mr. Obenauf and his wife came back to Columbus to start their company, because they felt it was a good place to raise their kids.

Some of the difficulties of starting this new business were being an independent publisher amongst large, strong publishing companies, getting to the point where they were receiving submissions, and were able to promote those submissions. They had no experience in this area, but Mr. Obenauf sees that as a strength, because people wanted something new and they were able to do things their own way.

According to Mr. Obenauf, there is no typical day. Any day can have an array of different work to do. Some of the many things he does includes printing books and sending them out to places such as the New York Times to be reviewed, obtaining foreign copyrights for the books. In fact, when I met with Mr. Obenauf, he said they had just received 3 offers on books from Italian publishers. When asked what he enjoys most about his job, he says that he likes being his own boss and deciding his own schedule, along with doing multiple things. When asked what he likes least, he says the stress of a small company competing with such large companies.

He also reads submissions for books that he gets via his website. He receives about 1200 submissions a year, but says he can tell within the first few pages if will be worth publishing or not. The work must be striking, bold, and distinctive. If it is an old story being retold, the writer has to have done something new with it. According to him, the best sellers are the riskier books.

Those riskier books seem to separate Two Dollar Radio from other independent publishers. The company’s slogan is *Books Too Loud to Ignore.* The books they publish are shocking, edgy, strong, and nearly even esoteric.

Although they did not have much of a say in the making of “I Smile Back”, after ten years the company produced it’s first movie, “I am Not Patrick”, after the rights were tossed around Hollywood. The movie set a foundation for what would come next. They did not spend any money on “I am Not Patrick”, but they’re upcoming movie “The Removals” will have a budget.

When I asked what skills were most important in the field of publishing, he said it depended on which path someone wanted. Someone who wants to be an editor has to have the ability to figure out what they author is attempting to do, and work with them to publish a great book, as opposed to the editor making it into their own work. The editor’s comments have to mesh with the author’s writing. The process of going back and forth between an editor and publisher to produce a final product usually takes about a year.

The future of publishing does not seem to be changing ion any dramatic way. People have enjoyed books in similar ways for centuries. Ebooks have not proven to affect the publishing field as much as previously believed. Amazon seems to be an obstacle for smaller publishers, but Two Dollar Radio makes it as easy as possible for people to take a chance on their books.

This field is incredibly interesting to me. It involves many of my skills including close reading, analyzing, and working with people to make a good product. It also contains a good balance of working with people and working alone. I learned how unpredictable the publishing field can be and how crucial it is to be bold, and create a community. Although I may want to work for a bigger company, Two Dollar Radio has a great atmosphere that encourages creativity and audaciousness.

