

集資最難 財務知識具優勢

華爾街尖子 變身荷里活萬能俠

海嘯爆發前，金融業炙手可熱，在華爾街打工的高薪族更是頭頂亮着光環。但隨着美股大崩盤，一改尖子們「以錢行先」的行業觀，頓時醒悟賺錢非人生唯一出路，逆市時反應善用興趣及優勢在金融業以外另謀高就。John Gilbert Donaldson, Jr.當年便放棄華爾街的高薪厚職，轉職電影業。18年前早播種，今天他正好趕趁數碼電影的頭場雨。 ■本報記者 程安怡 吳曉怡

18年前，未有複雜的投資產品，華爾街風光明媚。當時24歲的Gilbert剛取得經濟學碩士學位。符合學校與父母的期望，他獲聘為華爾街分析師，兩年間穿梭於著名的財行，包括E.F. Hutton、Shearson及U.S. Trust。正當所有人都對他的工作表現及能力予以高度評價時，他毅然辭去工作，1994年成立電影製作公司Laura Pels Productions。「那些人覺得我瘋了，僱主和顧客都極力挽留我，父母亦為此感到不快。但那兩年時光我真的不太快樂。」

電影製作要周身刀

Gilbert自小喜歡電影，不過要做電影製作人一點都不容易。他形容工作如「超級萬能俠」：發掘優秀的電影劇本，尋覓合適的導演。再根據以上兩個元素，找來前、中及後期製作的人才如攝影師、燈光師、配樂師及演員等。更要為他們準備租屋、配樂、電影運於2周內短貨、成一創舉。(網上圖片)



材及工作時間表，定期開會跟進。對沒有固定收入的製作人來說，賺與蝕都是未知數，因這往往視乎作品的受歡迎程度而定：「不論境況好壞，我從來沒有放棄過，更未有一刻感到後悔。即使我失敗過很多次，身邊的人都笑我傻，但我很享受每一秒的工作刺激。」

熟悉融資技巧 助電影順產

憶及最印象深刻作品，他指是1994年由紅髮女星Julianne Moore主演及名導Louis Malle執導的《Vanya on 42nd Street》。「那時資金和時間都不夠，是故我們用了兩周，差不多每天因在攝影棚24小時工作。」他想起來也覺瘋狂，但當電影得到提名及獎項，一切都是值得。

要說工作最大難度，自然是集資。Gilbert指，製作人不時要和銀行及投資者周旋，熟悉環球融資技巧是保持電影「順產」的要素：「我仍能把往日在華爾街建立的人脈，及大學的財務知識，套用在我喜歡的事業上。這是一個教育的延續，正好說明知識可在不同行業發揮。」

他當年成立公司的第一筆資金，便是從其中一對顧客而來：「他們甚至不知我將要幹甚麼，只是說，凡是我做的便會支持。」

後來，不少老顧客亦樂意投資他的電影，讓公司財政狀況常處於穩定狀態。

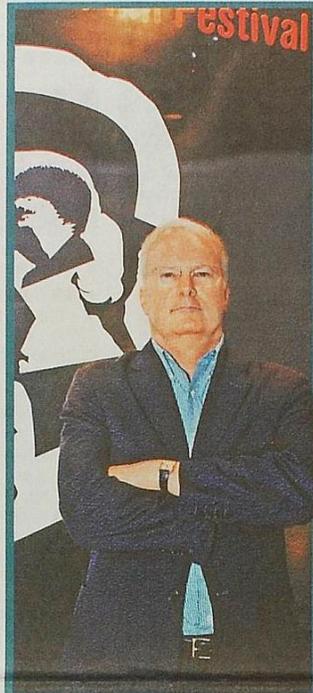
網上傳輸 培育觀眾素質

科技進步，令不同制式、容量的數碼娛樂產品也能在互聯網上通行無阻。由普通電影到今天容量極大的數碼電影、復修電影，在綫瀏覽、下載上傳，只要電腦配備足夠，說來只是幾小時的事。

Gilbert反為這發展感到雀躍，更指有助推動電影行業走近觀眾。作為數碼電影製作人，他多少會為生意憂心，因為網上傳輸對行業的收入有一定負面影響。「看到更多人可以因此接觸我們的製作，未知的人口增長令人興奮。觀眾看戲的經驗多了，因而培養出更好的鑑賞能力，也令我們期待。」

他說總有一天，安坐家中也能有數碼電影院的享受，所以在這之前，行業要付出更多努力，令觀眾明白電影有價。「互聯網很多資訊都是免費，但電影不是，它是很多創作人及技術人員的心血結晶，是值得觀眾支持的。」

◀Gilbert笑言轉行期間不斷失敗，但幸好得力於華爾街的人脈及財技，才能在電影界站穩。(劉曉麗攝)



歐美製片辛酸史

法國電影《The Father of My Children》，講述任職製作人的主角遇上財政危機，拍攝進度慢於預期，銀行戶口還凍結，投資者拒絕繼續資助。面對負債，未完成的電影計劃及超額預算，主角走投無路選擇輕生。故事改編自真人真事，現實中的主角是Gilbert的好友。「他是一個很有才華的製作人，製作過不少優秀的藝術電影，大家都很愛戴他。只是當時情況真的太壞，他又不希望賣掉製作公司，壓力下做了那個決定。我們都為此感到傷痛萬分。」



◀《The Father of My Children》既是08年康城獲獎作品，也剛在香港電影節上映，真人真事，紀錄歐美製片人的辛酸。(網上圖片)

分析員搶手 晉身大企高層

08年尾，數以萬計的華爾街尖子頓失金飯碗。在Bear Stearns任分析員的26歲美籍華人Stephen Chen，本以為不會成為刀下亡魂。「公司在投行界出名搏殺，無想到一樣要倒閉。」他的好友，在JP Morgan工作11年的Iris Chau也被裁員，迫使二人停下來構思往後的事業發展。當時，Iris的丈夫剛從菲律賓回國，發現當地放眼盡是廢棄輪胎，於是提出將橡膠循環再造造成環保沙灘拖鞋。

3人在曼克頓區租用一個小小的辦公室，開辦GreenSoul，處理網上定單。無薪金，無資源，亦無豐厚的花紅，Iris運用分析師的精打細算來營運，預料6至8個月回本，至2014年冀年銷量達100萬對。

除了創業，華爾街分析師獲聘為企業高層的做法也屢見不鮮，如Google曾於03年聘瑞銀的科技研究

部總監Lisa Buyer為業務優化總監，職責是統籌所有部門的優化流程，聽上去含糊空泛，其實即是協助整合公司營運，協助上市。不過Google上市後一年，她便跳槽到Tellme轉攻話音數據分析方案。

社交網絡遊戲發展商Playdom去年尾，亦躍致前華爾街分析師Christa Quarles為CFO。Playdom的王牌遊戲Mobsters在MySpace是遊戲王，玩家逾1,420萬。業界估計，Quarles的上場，也是為上市鋪路。



▲GreenSoul主力做環保生意，預計2014年將年賣100萬對環保拖鞋。(網上圖片)

FULL TRANSLATION

Before the outbreak of the financial tsunami, a vacancy in the financial industry was a very much sought-after position; those well-paid Wall Street fellows were considered haloed. As

the U.S. stock market slumped, though, many prestigious analysts, who once honored the principle of “money first,” came to a different insight. They understood making money is not the only way of life. During adversity, they should make use of their hobbies and advantages rather than sticking to the finance industry. Meet John Gilbert Donaldson, Jr., an ex-Wall Street player who had resigned from a job that provided fame and wealth. He is now working in the film industry.

Eighteen years ago, before there were any complicated investment products, Wall Street seemed very promising. Twenty-four-year-old Gilbert had just graduated with a bachelor’s degree in Economics. To meet the expectations of his school and parents, he became a Wall Street analyst working for different prominent financial institutes, including E.F. Hutton, Shearson and U.S. Trust. As his outstanding performance and high caliber earned him much praise and recognition, he resigned and set up a film production company called Laura Pels Productions in 1994. “Everyone thought I was crazy. My boss and clients tried to persuade me to stay; my parents were upset. Yet, I was not happy in those two years.”

Film production required versatility

Gilbert had loved movies since he was a child, but it is no easy task to be a film producer. He describes the job as that of “superman”: he has to search for excellent scripts and the right director. He has to recruit talents for different production stages – pre-production, production and post-production, for posts including cameramen, lighting crew, film score composers and actors, etc. He even needs to prepare the equipment and working schedule, holding regular meetings to check on the progress.

Producers don’t have a fixed income; he can never tell if he is going to make a profit since it all depends on the popularity of the movie. “Regardless of prosperity or adversity, I stick to my plan and I have no regrets. Even though I have failed many times and everyone says I am silly, I enjoy the excitement this job has to offer every second.”

Experience in financing benefits film production

Talking about his most memorable production, Gilbert uttered the name “Vanya on 42nd Street” in 1994, which featured red haired star Julianne Moore and the famous director Louis Malle. “We were running out of time and capital. Therefore, we had to work in the studio for 24 hours for two weeks,” he recalled. Gilbert confessed it was crazy, but all the hard work paid off when the movie received nominations and awards.

For the most challenging aspect of film production, it naturally comes to financing. Gilbert said producers often need to deal with bankers and investors, therefore a familiarity with global financing skills helps set the production of film straight. “I can still make use of my social network in Wall Street and the knowledge I learned from university. This is the extension of a learning process. It illustrates how knowledge can be applied in different industries,” he said.

Part of the startup fund for the company came from two clients. “They didn’t even know what I was going to do, but they said they would support whatever I wanted to try.”

Later on, many ex-clients were willing to invest in his films, and the company financial status thus remains sound.

Internet transmission helps cultivate audience flair

Technological advancements allow digital entertainment in different formats and sizes to be transferred via the Internet freely. With a powerful personal computer, anyone can browse, upload, download and restore movies, from average-sized ones to bulky digital productions.

Nevertheless, Gilbert is excited about this development. He believes this can promote the movie industry to the mass audiences. As a digital film producer, he can’t help but worry about his business, for Internet transmissions cast a shadow on the industry. “Our work becomes more accessible. The unknown growth in audiences brings great excitement. As audiences are exposed to more films, they will have better insights and we are looking forward to this, too.”

He predicts that there will be days when you can enjoy movies with the quality of digital cinema at home. Before that, the film industry has to pay more efforts, helping audiences to understand the value of film. “The Internet provides a lot of free information, but movies are not one of them. A movie is the result of the hard work of many artists and technicians. It deserves the support from audiences.”

A film production experience in the West

The French movie “The Father of My Children” depicts a producer facing financial crisis: overscheduled shooting, frozen bank accounts and investors who refuse to pay. In the face of debts, unfinished film projects and budgets running dry, the protagonist committed suicide. The story is an adaptation of a true story, and the leading character in real-life was a friend of Gilbert. “He was a talented producer. He had produced many outstanding art films. We all loved him. The situation back then was really bad and he didn’t want to sell the production company. He made the decision under great pressure. We felt so sorry and woeful.”

Analysts are in demand, many rise to management in large enterprise

At the end of 2008, many Wall Street star analysts lost their jobs. Twenty-six-year-old Stephen Chen worked as an analyst at Bear Stearns, and it never occurred to him there would be layoffs. “The company was famous for being aggressive, so the close down was really out of the blue.” His friend Iris Chau, who worked for JP Morgan for 11 years, was laid off too. They were forced to stop and think about their future careers. It was then that Iris’s husband came back from the Philippines and told them the country was full of wasted tires; he proposed to manufacture sustainable flip flops made with recycled rubber.

The trio rented a little office in Manhattan and set up GreenSoul, where they receive orders from the Internet. No pay, no resources, no big bonuses, but Iris operates the company with analyst-like meticulous calculation. The trio is expecting to get the investment back within six to eight months. By 2014, sales will reach up to one million pairs.

Apart from setting up businesses, many Wall Street analysts are hired as executives in large enterprises. For example, Google hired UBS Technology Research Director Lisa Buyer in 2003 as a business optimization director. She took charge of the overall optimization in all departments. This may sound vague, though the job is to integrate company operations to prepare for listing. After having worked for Google for a year, Lisa Buyer then job-hopped to Tellme, focusing on audio data analyze solution.

Social networking and gaming company Playdom hired previous Wall Street analyst Christa Quarles as CFO at the end of last year. Playdom is the developer of Mobsters, the successful game that tops the game chart in MySpace and has an audience of over 14.2 million. The industry hints that by hiring Quarles, Playdom is now preparing to be listed in the future.