

By Sheila Butler

CARRIE SNYDER: Clambake Animation Partner and Managing Director

Carrie Snyder Griffen is an adventurer as well as successful businesswoman (they do tend to go together). She fulfilled one of her dreams by completing two transatlantic sails – Boston Harbor to Scotland, Portugal to Antigua, then returning to Boston — with her father on their 60-foot wooden topsail schooner, *Welcome*. She rides hunter/jumpers competitively. As one of Lotus's first employees, she built its international PR/communications division. And now, as Partner and Managing Director of Clambake Animation LLC, she handles a break-neck commute between South Dartmouth and Watertown, MA, and Charleston, SC. She needs, really needs, her English Breakfast Tea.

Carrie has a solid reputation for guiding operations, management, and marketing at companies ranging from small start-ups to international corporations. At Clambake Animation, she is in charge of company operations, financial management, legal affairs, human resources, business development, and profitability. (Did we mention that she really needs her tea?) She is business director for all Clambake Animation-produced TV shows, including Cartoon Network/Adult Swim's "Assy McGee," animated shorts for WBGH's "Between the Lions," and "Design Squad," PBS's "Electric Company," an animatic for a Saatchi TV ad, and all shorts and original content.

Her 25-year career covers a range of business activities. Prior to Clambake, she was founder and president of Griffen Events, an events management and public relations firm. Before, she was director of corporate operations for start-up venture Co-nect (later sold to Pearson), a leading provider of K-12 professional development services.

Carrie was one of the earliest employees at Lotus Development Corp., which developed Lotus 1-2-3 and Notes. There, she created the company's first trade show and events department, overseeing 70 international events per year and a multimillion-dollar budget. She developed and produced Lotus Week, a 10,000-person international customer event, continuing today as LotusSphere. Her 18-year Lotus responsibilities grew to encompass a variety of sales, marketing, and communications positions, including manager of Lotus's international public relations department and director of executive operations for a 1,200-person Consulting Services division.

Prior to Lotus, Carrie was a start-up employee at Tom Snyder Productions Inc., where her brother, Tom, is known as "founder of educational software" and creator of award-winning animated programming for television, including "Dr. Katz," "Home Movies," and "Science Court."

In January 2007, Carrie and her two partners, Carl Adams and André Lyman (who worked together at Tom Snyder Productions for 15 years), financed and jump-started this independent, full-service animation studio in Watertown, MA. Clambake creates animated series for cable and TV, plus animated shorts for companies, ad agencies, and networks. It does work-for-hire projects as well as original content and, as a boutique studio, is agile, operating quickly and inexpensively. Their work is a collaboration between the writers, audio editors and talent, using a unique recording



process that combines improv and ad-lib with loose and hard scripting.

It all started with a call from her brother Tom, a mentor and source of inspiration. "I was in Charleston and Tom and Carl were meeting in Cambridge. Tom said that Carl needed a business partner and thought I'd be a good fit. I missed the start-up environment and love building an organization from the ground up, and the world of animation was in my DNA from years of observing Tom's work. So I decided to go for it.

"Also, I have the utmost respect for Carl and André's talents, comedic sensibility, and knowledge of the entertainment world. They've created and/or produced shows for all the major networks. And like me, they value the importance of hiring the right people, knowing that our ideas and abilities are nothing unless backed up by the best talent and personalities. I'm honored to work with them both."

Another mentor who influences Carrie's management style was Lotus CEO Jim Manzi. "One of the best things about Lotus was that Jim kept the runway clear for you to get the job done and succeed, with plenty of freedom to go with the responsibility. That's precisely the atmosphere we've created at Clambake."

Clambake's trademark is a humor-driven approach to content. (Drama runs in Carrie's family — there's Tom, of course; her mother was a prima ballerina on Broadway and entertained the troops during WWII; her sister is an actress; and her nieces and nephews are in the performing arts and animation.) The Clambake team loves comedy, TV, the movies, and surfing the Web — and use all to inform content.

"Our art is all about adding humor to the audio through gesture, character, and expression, and we use different mediums and tools — paper, live video, stop motion," says Carrie. "Our in-house animators bring a range of creative insight to every project and are multitasking and cross-trained in a variety of animation methods. We've got the full spectrum of artists, storyboarders, after-effects specialists, etc. And we're especially proud of our breadth of talent made possible by leveraging the latest sharing technology. By linking with a large pool of the most talented artists around, we can handle virtually every aspect of animated production."

Well-known comedians in Boston, LA, and NY record voice-overs in Clambake's studio (creative is audio-driven: once the audio is locked, the animation is crafted), while the



company handles all other aspects of the production process: ideation, content, script writing, artistic design, animation, editing, and post-production. Gifted artists from RISD, Mass Art, and elsewhere, as well as talented in-house audio engineers, producers, writers, editors, and musicians, bring the scripts to life. It's a creative environment in which teams collaborate based on strict schedules (and sometimes on the fly) to get projects out the door and they have a lot of fun along the way. Notes Carrie, "That we get to make people laugh is icing on the cake."

Carrie works a day or two from home in South Dartmouth. On days she's in the office, she gets up at 5 a.m. and leaves by 5:45, to avoid rush-hour traffic and be in Watertown by 7:15. Mornings are quiet so she catches up on emails and reading, and organizes the day. When staff starts arriving, things get lively. (The company has an open floor plan, which makes communication effortless as well as amusing. There are no layers of people and processes.)

First thing, tea in hand, she sits down with her partners to review development projects, schedules, staffing requirements, and budgets, and to strategize about new business. "Each of us brings a different perspective to the business, so our skills complement each other nicely," says Carrie. Partner André concurs: "Carrie handles everything that gives Carl and me stomachaches, the financial and administrative part. We're focused on 'what does it take to make the stuff' whereas she's focused on 'what does it take to make it happen.' She's got a great sense of humor and a careful but relaxed sense of responsibility. She asks questions maybe we wouldn't think of and is an incredibly hard worker."

Next, the entire company might gather to review artwork or an animatic, or to listen to audio takes. On record days when outside talent (generally well-known comedians) comes in, the studio gets hopping, with Carl directing and André collecting his artists to start visualizing and drawing characters and background.

Meanwhile, there are lots of day-to-day functions Carrie performs: reviewing a legal document, checking on AFTRA rates, building a budget for a new series, cold calling, dealing with benefits management, buying equipment, processing employee forms, negotiating a contract, taking out the trash...

She enjoys simply connecting with team members: "Because I was so heavily influenced by my time at Lotus, a place where most employees



clockwise from top left
The principals of Clambake Animation: André Lyman, Carrie Snyder, Carl Adams and our senior animator, Lily. Photo courtesy of Clambake Animation.

Carrie Snyder working on a 20 episode budget at Clambake Animation. Photo courtesy of Clambake Animation.

Carrie squeezes in a little bit of bush hogging between meetings. Photo courtesy of Clambake Animation.

"We are happy to be profitable this year, thanks to great teamwork." Photo courtesy of Clambake Animation.

Cartoons are silly. Contracts are serious. Carrie takes a break and heads over to peek at artist Natalie Barahonas command of silliness. Photo courtesy of Clambake Animation.



A bold and candid look into Lower Allston youth is this project under development.



Captain Cluck teaches lessons with her poultry entourage for PBS "Electric Company".

loved showing up for work, I wanted to foster a similar working environment at Clambake. Our goal was to create a place where motivated, smart, talented, and positive people would love to come to work. So far, we've succeeded: We've had more than 45 employees and contractors in the studio since starting up, and every one has been a great addition. We are keenly aware that one bad apple can sour the environment, so we choose our people carefully."

Carrie notes that in running the business side of Clambake, she has been heavily influenced by her husband, William. "My husband is a real inspiration and supporter. He never quits and always finds a better way. He has an enthusiastic spirit as well as enormous integrity and self-discipline, as a recently retired (after 26 years) Marine Corps colonel who flew F-18s and was a Top Gun. I've also learned from him about always doing the right thing by people — be fair, listen, support your people, and then get out of the way."

That approach seems to be working just fine: New projects, much of them repeat business, in the works are a video game, a series of children's shorts, four original shows for cable, and a new pilot for Adult Swim. (Unlike Assy McGee, the principal character this time might actually have a torso.)

For more information visit www.clambakeanimation.com.

Freelance writer, copy editor, PR/marketer, illustrator, skeet shooter whose had the pleasure to work with The Mothers of Invention, Digitalis, The Boston Group, AMP/Alloy Marketing + Media, Partners+simons, WGBH-TV/FM, and many more. Inspired by Carrie's story.