



*An interview by Jake Friedman*

## Profile: Fred Seibert

In recent years, Fred Seibert and his Frederator Studios have been an open door to all who want fame and glory. As an independent producer, he not only pushes creator-driven projects forward but offers his ear to show pitches here in New York and in LA. He executive-produced such cartoon hits as "Chalk Zone," "Fairly Oddparents," "My Life as a Teenage Robot," and most recently the preschool project "Wow! Wow! Wubbzy!" with Susan Miller and creator Rob Boyle. Seibert discusses winning pitches in Dave Levy's *Your Career in Animation*, but I was intent on finding out the whole story.

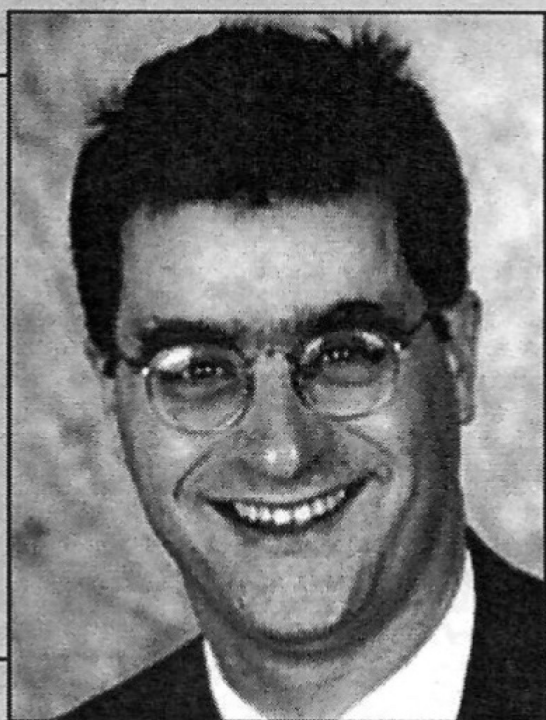
### **What path did you take to be where you are in animation today?**

I never thought I'd do animation. The first piece of animation I ever worked on was in 1975 – I composed and produced a soundtrack for a student film. I was just out of school, and I was a recording engineer and record producer. And then in 1978 I did a few animated commercials for radio stations through my boss, who knew how to do such things. We created, conceived and produced some animated commercials with animation production companies around the country. In 1980 I went to work in cable television for the first time and I ran the promotion dept for a

number of cable TV networks that were starting. We started doing animated station identifications. Over the next 10 years I probably produced a thousand 10-second station identifications, with animation studios from all over the world. And then in 1992 I became president of Hanna Barbera cartoons and that got me into storytelling animation, which is what I do to this day.

### **How did you land that job as president of Hanna Barbera?**

It was a stupid happy accident. I was at Universal Studios Florida on their opening day, and they had a Hanna Barbera ride. I've always loved the Hanna Barbera characters, so I went on this great ride. At the end of the ride they had a store, and I bought as much as I could hold, including a Hanna Barbera watch. I went out to dinner with a friend of mine at a really fancy restaurant, and he said, "What's that watch?" I said, "This is my Hanna Barbera watch. What's yours, like a rolex?" Fast-forward 18 months. That guy became president of Ted Turner's entertainment company. So he calls me up one day and says, "You know we just bought Hanna Barbera. ... You want to run it?" And I looked down and I had the same watch on.



So I went to Hanna Barbera, and I assumed that my whole life in the cartoon business would be my years there, which ended up being five. After that, Ted Turner sold his whole company to Time Warner, and I made the decision to find something else to do, at which time the guy who was the president of Nickelodeon called me up – I knew him for many years, since I was 17 – and he said, “Hey, are you doing anything? Maybe you want to make cartoons with us.” I set up an independent production company, Frederator, and made a deal with Nickelodeon and I’ve been making kids cartoon shows with them ever since.

**Why didn’t you create your own production studio here?**

I don’t have the money to do that. As an independent producer, you’re always making tradeoffs, and you have to decide what’s worth investing in and what isn’t. I decided that the best way to deploy my capital was not to sink it into real estate and

equipment. Nickelodeon already has 75,000 square feet of space allocated to animation. They made the investment, and I’d rather they’d front that expense than me.

It’s funny, to business people, I’m a total lunatic creative person, and to creative people, I’m a suit. The truth is I have a few skills in each. I’m not only involved in Frederator studios. I have a number of Internet businesses that I’m at various stages of developing. I also consult with the MTV networks, which includes Nickelodeon, on programming, branding and marketing issues. I’ve done that for nine years now.

**What’s an average day like for you?**

If I’m in Los Angeles, I’m meeting with various productions I’m involved in, seeing what they’re up to, meeting with my development department and seeing what’s new on their plate and what we’re thinking about making, and who might want to buy it, or finance it, or draw it – all aspects of business and creative. I’m responsible for delivering a product and its results. And then I’ll take pitches from animators, and then meet with various business folk.

If I’m in New York, it’s pretty much the same, except I’ll have meetings on the phone. I’ll also sit with our producers and programmers on Channel Frederator, our podcast, and Refrederator, our vintage cartoon podcast, and the Wubbcast, which is our preschool podcast.

**FREDERATOR**

**Where does a person learn how to become a producer?**

You stumble through life. There are people like Joel Silver who went to NYU to become a producer, but at school I studied chemistry and then history.

**Why did you set up camp here in New York?**

I believe that if you're going to be in commercial storytelling animation, you should be in LA. But once I had children, I wanted to raise them in New York. I don't really want to go back. I think New York is a great place to work and there's some amazing talent here. I would love to find a show to do here. I probably will. Out of the last 39 shorts we did for Nickelodeon, about 7 were New York-based people.

Before I had kids, I worked pretty much from 8 until midnight, six nights a week. What else are you going to do? I only work in things that I love doing, and for me working and playing are not all that dissimilar. Once I had kids I started going home on time. And once my kids go to sleep at 9 o'clock, my computer pops open and I work 'til midnight.

**Have you made any mistakes that you'd care to share?**

I have burned many bridges with people by being an arrogant cluck. Aside from the human consequences of that, there have been horrible business consequences. Many of those people have turned into very important powerful people who I can't do business with. At around 40, I tried to stop being so judgmental about

people, and to be a bit happier about life, and it made my business life a lot better. It's just easier to be happy than to be unhappy. It means no matter how badly things go, I feel really, really lucky to have the chance to do the things that I like to do.

**What's the hardest thing about doing what you do?**

Living up to my obligations to people.

**What's the biggest perk?**

I'm happy!

**Why did you choose to do what you're doing?**

The truth is, it chose me. By my nature, I do a lot of things. The ones I keep doing are the ones that serve me well and that I serve well. My mom told me growing up that I should worry about being a jack-of-all-trades, master of none. Truth is, I'm exactly that. So all I can do is be a producer. But I'm also just a big fan; I really love talented, passionate people. And I can be swayed to like things that I never knew I would like because of their talent and their passion.

**How do I get to be where you are now?**

The boring answer is hard work, passion and commitment, and a lot of luck. But as my mom told me, you make your luck. And if you're sitting at home, luck will never find you. Go out. Pound the pavement. You could attend ASIFA's meetings, for example!

*Jake Friedman is a NY-based animator and animation journalist. Visit him at [www.jakefriedman.net](http://www.jakefriedman.net)*