

How Success Happened for Round Room Live Co-Presidents Stephen Shaw and Jonathan Linden

Opinions expressed by *Entrepreneur* contributors are their own.

Round Room Live, an eOne company led by co-Presidents Stephen Shaw and Jonathan Linden, has been called by *Billboard* “the new leader in the family show entertainment space.” The company specializes in transforming new and iconic intellectual properties into live events, staging experiences ranging from family shows featuring beloved characters to events and exhibitions focused on leading cultural figures and touchstones. Round Room Live was one of the first family show producers to build a live show around a series created on YouTube for pre-school audiences—most stick with licensing television and motion picture content.

The company’s current roster of world-touring theatrical shows includes: *Baby Shark Live!*, *Blippi The Musical*, *Peppa Pig Live*, *Blue’s Clues & You! Live On Stage* and *PJ Masks Live!*. Round Room’s Exhibitions Division is currently touring *Jurassic World: The Exhibition*; *Mandela: The Official Exhibition*; and *Tupac Shakur. Wake Me When I’m Free*, which opened in Los Angeles in January 2022. Reflecting Round Room Live’s connection with audiences, March 2022 marked the most successful month in its history – an amazing feat considering the continuing uncertainty of the live performance space.

Related: Why Live Events Are Rocket Fuel for Business Growth

In fact, with the recent announcement of *Blues Clues & You! Live On Stage*, scheduled for this fall, Round Room Live will cap 2022 as one of the highest gross of any kids' theatrical business, with 650 kids' shows across four tours, and 125 weeks of runtime across four touring exhibitions. "They are creatives who make two hours in an arena seat watching a children's show come to life as an event which binds a family," says *Forbes*.

Running the show

Round Room Live creates entire productions and manages them. The producing side has creative directors, writers, directors, actors, choreographers, and scene and costume designers. Another side is the touring team, who handles marketing, promotion, ticketing, and merchandise. There are concurrent companies across the country, just as a touring Broadway show does.

Founder and Co-President Stephen Shaw and Co-President Jonathan Linden are entertainment industry veterans who learned the business from some of the greatest visionaries and pioneers of this industry, who were responsible for promoting some of the highest-grossing arena and stadium level concert tours in history, including The Rolling Stones and Barbra Streisand". They've built their Round Room Live events with the same dazzling, high-tech production style they knew from rock stadium shows and Broadway—creating high-energy, visually stunning entertainment for audiences of all ages. In 2018, Entertainment One (eOne) acquired a majority position in Round Room Live; eOne is now a division of Hasbro.

Leading and growing

Stephen Shaw, a self-described 'methodical' risk-taker, cites the founding of Round Room Live as the biggest risk he's ever taken. He left a great position as president of Michael Cohl's

company S2BN Entertainment, where his boss, Cohl, taught him how to be a producer and promoter, as well as the strategies of building and running a business. Shaw and his wife put everything they had into Round Room Live, to acquire initial intellectual properties, develop a few projects, and pay a small staff to help build them out. Shaw also cites his father as a formative influence on his career; not only for his hard work ethos, but for his modeling of a healthy work-life balance.

A seminal turning point in Shaw's leadership was forming a board of directors, at which point he was no longer working with the team he'd assembled but with experienced executives, investors, and shareholders. "That's when you need to put on your big boy pants and be a true leader," he said. His greatest challenges as an entrepreneur have been building out an experienced team, finding and developing premium intellectual property, and being patient about sustained growth.

Related: 8 Ways to Get the Most Out of Networking Events

Shaw is always excited by a successful show, a packed house, and a demand for tickets. He also gets deep satisfaction from brand building, creating something from nothing, and turning an idea into a plan. His daily routine includes a morning run ("my lifesaver") and working early before the distraction of emails and calls. And during the pandemic, with endless Zoom and phone calls, he discovered a digital note-taking device called reMarkable, which organizes notes in their respective folders, transfers them to Word docs, and emails them to him. Asked about the most worthwhile investment he's ever made, Shaw says it's his wife and his kids—and being a dad.

Round Room Live Co-President Jonathan Linden was previously the CEO of Michael Cohl's S2BN Entertainment. Jonathan started his career as an attorney (a benefit in the live entertainment world) and earned an MBA from the Kellogg School of Management

at Northwestern University. He was recruited by Cohl to work with him at Live Nation where he first met and became friends with Shaw. He was a Senior VP, Office of the Chairman at Live Nation and he led and managed numerous major transactions in the live entertainment space, including rights deals for major concert artists and the acquisition of one of the largest merchandising and licensing companies in the entertainment world. Linden has been part of the senior team producing and promoting numerous high-profile projects including Barbra Streisand tours, An Evening with Oprah Winfrey, and Broadway's shows including Rock of Ages—for which he was lead producer.

Linden says one of his greatest business victories was getting eOne to back Round Room Live just two years after the company started. He saw it as validation that what they were proposing to do was on track and as exciting to a large corporate partner as it was to them. One of his greatest risks was leaving a great law firm and taking the plunge into the entertainment business.

Related: How to Pick the Right Networking Events to Attend

After years of working for other people, Linden says Round Room Live has provided the opportunity to choose projects, select the team, and chart the path with Shaw—growing the company excites him every day. He knew that Round Room Live was taking a different angle on kids and family touring. They were taking chances on brands that didn't have broadcast tv shows to back them; the risk was sensing that the world was changing and the types of brands that were popular were changing—and the risks have paid off.

Linden is an avid podcast listener (particularly those about the journeys of successful entrepreneurs). He loves watching sports, and he reads to wind down—currently “Shoe Dog” by Phil Knight. When it comes to tech, Jonathan finds the Apple Watch to be more useful than he ever anticipated, and it has solved a few office emergencies. He's involved in all his kids'

activities and enjoys talking sports with his son, who shares his fantasy football team and hockey and football card collections. He continues to hope his 11-year-old daughter will include him in one of her dance parties.

Round Room Live is at the cutting edge of the ongoing evolution of kids and family entertainment. It has revitalized the model, finding new ways to monetize intellectual property and maximize revenue with multiple performing units on tour simultaneously. "Their success is well earned;" says *Forbes*, "it comes from doing the work well."

<https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/428193>