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Business leaders share their success stories

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Laurie Silvers, co-creator of the SciFi Channel, wasn't immediately sold on the idea of starting the network, thinking that science fiction fans were "nutjobs."

That is, until she did a little research on the popularity of the genre. The Boca Raton resident might not have been a Trekkie when she and her husband researched the idea in the '80s, but soon learned the potential for its success. Although she sold it to Universal, the channel is currently valued about \$4 billion.

Tuesday was Day 2 of the Global Entrepreneurship Week events at the University of Miami, where visitors heard business leaders share their start-up stories.

"I didn't know anything about science fiction," Silvers said to an audience of 70 people -- mostly students -- Tuesday morning. "If I was not going to be credible, if I couldn't talk about my product, it was not going to go anywhere."

Her solution: Surround herself with big names in science fiction who know what they're talking about. Popular science fiction author Isaac Asimov and *Star Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry were among those on her board of advisors, although they didn't live long enough to see the channel's launch in 1994.

Silvers is on the board of directors of UM's LaunchPad, a resource center for student entrepreneurs, which put together the week's events. She's been with the program for a year, and advises students that making dreams a reality means coming to terms with how difficult it is to find financing these days.

"We live in a very challenging economic times," Silvers told The Miami Herald. "And people better be able to stand on their own two feet."

The day's conversation went from phasers to Facebook as an afternoon panel of South Florida Internet entrepreneurs shared their experiences starting a Web-based business.

Among the panelists was Brian Javeline, CEO of MyOnlineToolbox.com in Pompano Beach. He left students with the encouragement to give it a shot if they can afford to lose a few years pursuing their idea.

"It's gonna be scary, don't get me wrong," Javeline said. "If you can handle a lot of things that will go wrong, and most likely there's a good chance you're going to fail, accept it and treat it as the next level of education in your world of entrepreneurship."

To read more about what advice panelists gave and for coverage of the Global Entrepreneurship Week , check out the All Business blog on MiamiHerald.com/smallbusiness.

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