

## **While You Were Working: Online MBAs Make Good Television and Better Business Sense**

By Clare Kaufman

No doubt you've heard the buzz on online MBA degree-holder Jenn Hoffman, dubbed "The Blonde" on *The Apprentice: Los Angeles*. For business advancement, the MBA degree has become as de rigueur as a classy suit. Whether you're a footloose European traveler like Jenn or a working professional with no time for a campus-based degree program, you can make an MBA education happen for you.

### **Eyes on the Prize**

Even if you're not eyeing Donald Trump's executive suite, new career opportunities, higher salaries, and a broader business perspective are the benefits you can reap from graduate business study. When the competitive job market feels like an *Apprentice* boardroom showdown, your MBA can give you an edge when it comes to landing a promotion or securing a new job. Fortunately, online MBA programs help working professionals like you in real life, not just in reality television.

### **A Win-Win Situation**

An MBA degree tells a manager or recruiter that you have the insight and analytical skills to bring real value to a business. Leslie Zurburg, HR manager for Williams-Sonoma, explains why her company prefers MBAs: "We are looking for the 50,000-foot view--the strategic thinker who takes an analytical approach." In addition to business acumen, corporate recruiters look to MBAs for leadership skills, adaptability, and the ability to

communicate effectively with clients and colleagues.

And the value you bring to your company will be returned three-fold to you. Increased career options, higher salary, and development of essential skills ranked as the most important benefits of the MBA, according to the Graduate Management Admission Council's 2005 Survey. Additionally, three-quarters of MBA alumni polled reported that they made the right decision by pursuing an MBA.

### **Promotions, Salary Raises, and More**

In terms of salary boost and career advancement, the numbers speak for themselves. The typical MBA graduate in the class of 2006 made \$61,302 before earning the MBA degree and expects a post-MBA salary of \$86,350--that's a 41% increase. Thirty-eight percent of alumni one to five years out of business school have received at least one promotion in their current job since graduation, and nearly a quarter of that percentage has received three or more. Most MBA alumni report that they couldn't have gotten their jobs without their MBA degree, according to the 2006 Global MBA Graduate Survey.

But one of the most compelling benefits of an MBA degree is developing a professional outlook. Healthcare consultant Susan Odegaard Turner comments, "It gave me a broad perspective of the business world. How the economy works [and]

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how my industry works." MBA alumni credit the degree with cultivating the essential skills they use every day: their ability to think critically, deal with ambiguity, and solve complex problems.

### **A Degree Apart**

Just as media maven Jenn must distinguish herself from fellow Apprentice hopefuls, everyone in business needs to brand their image. The MBA helps graduates rise above the pack. To a certain extent, the aura of the degree accounts for this success. "The degree gave me credibility," comments Turner, whose position was upgraded from ER manager to ambulatory care director post-MBA. But it's not just the three letters that make the difference. The MBA empowers graduates to generate new ideas, and it's this "fresh perspective," as one employer calls it, that sets them apart.

In a practical sense, MBA graduates can carve out a niche by pursuing a specialized focus or functional area while in school. Career-specific programs are available in areas as varied as IT and public policy. Popular specialty programs include MBA with emphases in computational finance, industrial administration, healthcare/hospital administration, and public accountancy. International business concentrations are also emerging to help students take advantage of opportunities in fast-growing markets such as China, India, and Central America.

### **Getting There**

The value of an online MBA degree is unquestionable, whether you're a media savvy upward bound young professional like Jenn Hoffman or a working professional trying to get from business point A to an executive office.

The online MBA accommodates the working professional with family responsibilities by incorporating flexibility into every aspect of the program. You can work at your own pace, when and where you like. According to a study released by the U.S. Department of Education, three-quarters of all MBA students complete the degree while working full-time. The average online student is a working adult between ages 24 and 50.

Logging onto the virtual MBA classroom also carries other benefits. Your online MBA colleagues are likely to be established members of the business community returning to school for a second degree. The combined experience online MBA students bring to the table makes for a richer educational experience and more valuable contacts.

Online degree programs have made the MBA more accessible than ever. With this kind of convenience, there's no reason even reality TV stars in the making can't pursue an MBA. Log in to graduate school every week, and you'll cast yourself as an achiever with the gold standard of professional life: an MBA.