

Top banana

meet online entrepreneur Matthew Skallerud

By Matt Kailey

Marriage rights in California, out politicians, straight businesses catering to GLBT tastes – as the GLBT population goes mainstream, will we lose our sense of community? Not at all, says entrepreneur and online guru Matthew Skallerud, founder of Pink Banana World and Pink Banana Media. No matter how mainstream the GLBT community becomes, GLBT people will always want and need a place to connect with each other. And they are finding that on the Internet.

Skallerud, a successful but “bored” laser research engineer who preferred sales, marketing and working with people to working with lasers, recognized the importance of the Internet when he founded GayWired.com in 1995.

“At the time,” Skallerud says, “there was no Yahoo, there was nothing really out there in terms of finding resources. ... So I created GayWired as a site that would be almost like a directory, where people could find all this stuff that was out there. ... And what happened was, really quickly, companies started to come to us and want to fill in the gaps of what was there. ... So it slowly became kind of a content-based site ... and it just sort of had a life of its own.”

GayWired.com was so successful that Skallerud and his partners soon realized the need for expanded content – and an expanded reach. So they founded LesbianNation.com for women, GaySports.com for sports enthusiasts and several other sites. All Skallerud’s sites were sold to here!TV in 2006, but instead of kicking back and planning an early retirement in the Bahamas, he did what most successful entrepreneurs do – he started more businesses.

Pink Banana World reflects Skallerud’s ongoing desire to give GLBT people a place to connect. This social networking site allows users to combine their many online sites and spaces into one integrated online identity and to meet and socialize with other like-minded individuals.

“Pink Banana World is a ton of fun,” says Skallerud. “It’s this whole idea about you and your identity. You’re going to be able to create your identity online. ... You have a life. You post different pieces of that online. And all those sites (Flickr, YouTube, MySpace, Facebook) create opportunities for that information to be shared. So we created a gay site to take that forward.”

When you create an account on Pink Banana World, you can pull information from your MySpace pages, your YouTube pages, your photos on Flickr and your other online sites and combine it into one profile that reflects your GLBT identity.

“The beauty of it,” says Skallerud, “is that the user doesn’t have to do any other work. They do that (initial) work and it’s done.”

In addition, Pink Banana World posts news and entertainment content from many other sites, providing users with information, videos, photos, podcasts and more that they might not even realize was available. And all are linked back to their original source.

“We’re not taking traffic from people,” says Skallerud. “We’re hopefully making more awareness of gay life out there. The word is aggregator. We’re aggregating content from all over the gay Internet using this technology that allows it to be shared, and we’re also doing the same with people’s profiles.”

On the other hand, Pink Banana Media focuses on the marketing side of the GLBT equation – helping business-

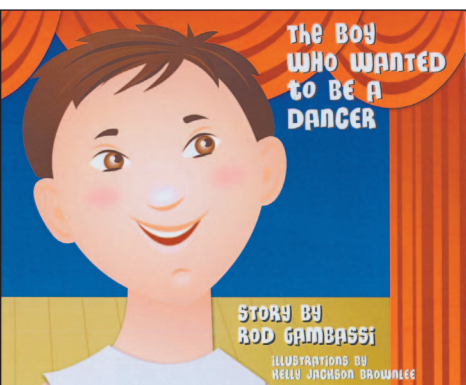
es and other clients reach the lucrative GLBT market. Through Web 2.0 marketing techniques, Pink Banana Media provides clients with a comprehensive marketing strategy to reach GLBT clients where they live – online.

But while there are definitely GLBT-oriented blogs and Web sites, MySpace, Facebook and other social networking sites are not GLBT specific. As the GLBT community integrates into the mainstream, will there still be a need for GLBT-specific sites?

“The answer would be yes,” says Skallerud. “I say that twofold. One, as long as I think that people understand that the number-one common denominator we all have is social. We like to socialize with other gay people – and that could be friends, partners, married life, dates and all things in between. Whatever we’re looking for, it’s the social aspect. So the online component has developed more and more over the last few years as being much more relevant.

“There’s another argument. You could say that maybe some people are going on the Internet to find what they were looking for in a bar, but in general, it’s a bigger issue. I would say we got what we asked for. We wanted to be more accepted in the community. ... It’s been happening for the last 10 or 20 years. So the pioneers and the activists have really kind of set the path. But now we’re getting it and we don’t always know exactly what to do and what that looks like. ... So at the end of the day, there will always be that social site, where there will always be gay people socializing, and so all the different businesses or different components that help facilitate that will always be successful.” ■

For more information, go to www.pinkbananaworld.com and www.pinkbananamedia.com.

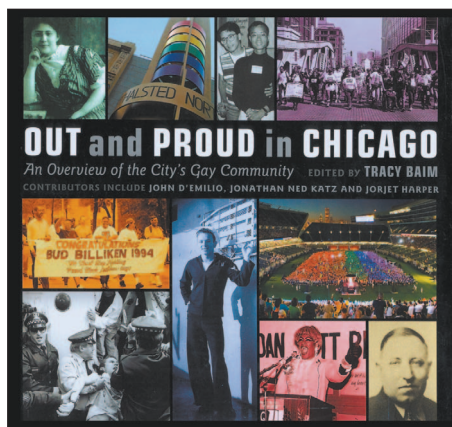
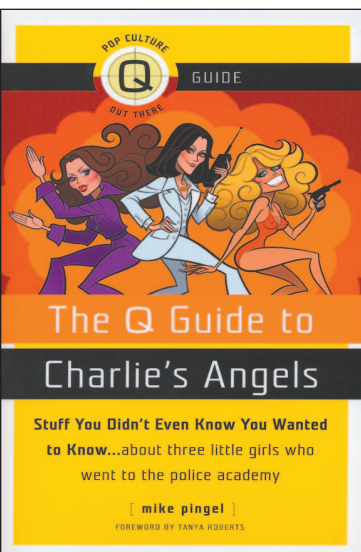


By Jerry L. Wheeler

The Boy Who Wanted to be a Dancer –
Rod Gambassi and Kelly Jackson Brownlee
(Window Books, \$23.95)

The Q Guide to Charlie’s Angels –
Mike Pingel
(Alyson Books, \$12.95)

Out and Proud in Chicago –
Tracy Baim, ed.
(Agate Surrey Books, \$30)



First up, a book for kids – a terrific little tale about Bobby, the boy who wanted to be a dancer. This book has everything: supportive parents, a mean brother, a dance recital, an important message about following your dreams no matter who makes fun of you and an even more important message about forgiveness. Simple

but not simplistic, the story will ring true with every child, and the drawings are cute as well.

Second, we have a book for big kids – or at least Charlie’s Angels fans. Not quite as gay as *The Q Guide to The Golden Girls* or *The Q*

Guide to Sex and the City (both available from Alyson Books), *The Q Guide to Charlie’s Angels* is pretty damn gay, and we’re talkin’ feathered, Jose Eber-hair gay. In fact, Jose Eber gets his own chapter to discuss Angel hair.

Author Mike Pingel is a certified Angel guru, bringing all his powers of trivia to bear on Angel backgrounds, Angel history, Angel counterfeits and Angel cartoons. More than just a recap of all 109 episodes, this guide is done with wit and glitzy style, its queer eye firmly fixed on entertaining as well as informing.

Which Angel are you? I’m Sabrina – not the prettiest, but definitely the sassiest.

And speaking of sassy, there’s some sassy photography in *Out and Proud in Chicago*, a big coffee-table book full of pictures and history of GLBT life in Chicago, from Oscar Wilde’s appearance on his American tour of 1892 to the Gay Games in 2006. In between are fascinating articles about bars, organizations and legendary gay public figures based in Chicago, like Jane Addams (founder of Hull House), Louis Sullivan (architect), Mark Turbyfill (dancer) and Henry Gerber (founder, in 1924, of the Chicago Society for Human Rights – the oldest documented gay civil rights organization in the United States). Every page has some interesting factoid or curious story to tell about a GLBT member of the community.

I wish someone would write one about Denver – I’m sure our history is just as colorful, if not quite as long. After all, we’re just as gay here as they are in the Midwest.

Aren’t we? ■

Photo credits for the Broadway Bares book article in August 20 issue were accidentally omitted. Photos in the article are by (clockwise from top): (c) Tomas Vrzala; David Morgan; Tomas Vrzala; and Rivka and Moshe Katvan from *Backstage Pass* by Jerry Mitchell, Universe, 2008.