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HOW I GOT HERE | NOVEMBER 3, 2009

## Making a Career of Anime

By SARAH E. NEEDLEMAN

**Name:** Adam Sheehan

**Current Job:** Senior Events Manager, FUNimation Entertainment

**First Job:** Washing dishes at a diner

**Education:** Bachelor's in marketing, University of Texas at Arlington

**How I got here in 10 words or less:** By always striving to create a better event

Adam Sheehan has what Japanese animation fans might consider a dream job. As a senior events manager for Funimation Entertainment, a producer of shows like "Dragon Ball Z" and "Soul Eater," he sets up video screenings, autograph signings and other activities at about 20 anime conventions a year. But Mr. Sheehan, 32, says launching a career tied to a special interest typically requires more than deep-seated passion. Education, pro-bono experience and networking is also essential. Edited interview excerpts follow.

**Q: How did you get hooked on anime in the first place?**

**A:** I grew up watching cartoons like Astro Boy, Voltron and Robotec.

**Q: You also got involved in college. How?**

**A:** I majored in marketing at the University of Texas at Arlington and served as president of the school's anime club for three years.

**Q: How did you land your first anime job?**

**A:** During my junior year (in college), I did pro bono work at anime conventions for a friend who had just started a marketing firm. It was to get something on my résumé. I learned so much and so fast. After graduation, I got a job offer right out of the gate with Score Entertainment as a tour manager for the Dragon Ball Z TCG (trading-card game). My job was to go to malls and conventions around the country in an H1 (Hummer vehicle) decorated with characters from Dragon Ball Z. We ran demos of the game, gave away prizes and had voice-over actors for the show sign autographs. It was incredible.

**Q: After three years, you changed jobs. Why?**

**A:** I'm more of an anime fan than a card-game player. So one day I called Funimation and said 'I'd love to work with you guys.' I got to know them through the mall events and conventions because we hired their actors a lot. You

have to grow relationships however they come. If it wasn't for me being so close to these people, getting my job wouldn't have been so easy.

***Q: Fans at anime conventions often dress as their favorite characters. Do you ever forget you're working?***

**A:** I always need to keep a friendly and professional demeanor. I have to demonstrate full knowledge of all of our shows, the company and the industry overall. When I'm speaking on panels, which average about 500 to 800 people, I have to say everything very carefully since I may be quoted. Someone might be blogging about the event while it's happening or filming it for the Web.

***Q: Any career highlights to share?***

**A:** There's a super group of four female Japanese manga artists called Clamp, and (Funimation) had a chance to bring them to the U.S. for the first time in 2006. It was the biggest event of my career. It involved six different companies world-wide and took about the nine months of the heaviest planning I've ever had to do. It was for the Anime Expo in Anaheim, Calif., and it drew the biggest crowd that Clamp had ever received—about 5,000 people.

***Q: Any advice for pursuing a career like yours?***

**A:** Get involved as soon as possible. We get a lot of fans who come up to us and (tell us) they love your shows and want to work for (us). Some clearly just want to be closer to the shows they love, but others talk about the business and how they're going to school for it. Those are the ones who actually get to the next step.

**Write to Sarah E. Needleman at [sarah.needleman@wsj.com](mailto:sarah.needleman@wsj.com)**

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