

Super Teaching: Why is UAH involved with a “very dangerous con man?”

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by Brian

The University of Alabama in Huntsville has put up its credibility as an institution of higher learning as collateral to develop and market the invention of a twice convicted con man — and no one seems to be paying attention.

The “invention” in question is called [Super Teaching](#) (interchangeably used as one or two words). Here is the description of this revolutionary learning system from the UAH website:

SuperTeaching is a multi-sensory instructional system designed to utilize computer generated audio and imagery in order to engage learners. The SuperTeaching system includes three screens positioned at the front of the room, which display images in a seemingly random pattern. The images included in the pattern roll are those of the instructor, learners, course content, and nature scenes.

That’s right, three screens with “seemingly random” images, which include nature scenes. Hold your laughter at the notion that this is being proposed as an actual classroom teaching tool.

Super Teaching was [introduced at UAH](#) with some fanfare nearly a year ago. In a bit of unintended symbolism the featured speaker at the unveiling of an unproven sensory overload tool was Tony Robbins, the motivational speaker of late night infomercial fame.

The story behind Super Teaching and the man who takes credit for inventing it is where this story becomes quite sordid. The man’s name is Bernhard (or BJ or Berny or Bernie) Dohrmann. He is a purveyor of membership based business networking and feel good seminars and lived in Huntsville until recently. To say that he has a checkered past of business dealings would be a dramatic understatement. [From a 2002 San Francisco Chronicle article](#) (Dohrmann used to operate in that area):

Thousands of Californians, including many from the Bay Area, are flocking to pricey business seminars in Los Angeles to learn how to launch their own companies.

That in itself is not unusual. What is unusual is that the fellow they’re turning to for guidance has been tangling with law-enforcement authorities for decades, including convictions for securities fraud and criminal contempt. More remarkable still, the man at the helm of Income Builders International has himself apparently never run a successful business. At least not until now.

And if Bernhard Dohrmann, a former Marin County resident based today in Alabama, has his way, his current focus on business seminars will soon shift to a scheme in which he wires up all schools with computers designed to “balance” the two sides of students’ brains.

Is this the land of opportunity or what?

Before Income Builders International, or IBI for short, found its stride, Dohrmann, 54, was known primarily for his involvement in a string of dubious business ventures.

“We think he’s a very dangerous con man,” Assistant U.S. Attorney Mark Zanides said in 1995 when Dohrmann was sentenced to 28 months in prison for once again engaging in fraudulent business practices.

The article goes on to list two separate schemes that landed Dohrmann behind bars and a third that he settled out of court with the FTC. His first criminal endeavor was selling “nonexistent” rail cars to investors. He later served as an executive at a diamond trading company that went bankrupt. He was charged with making false claims and guarantees by the FTC. Here is how the [Chronicle explained the third operation](#):

Around 1984, Dohrmann founded Invest America, which was supposed to become a nationwide network of independent financial planners. Invest America offered “business opportunities” — such as public telephones, solar heaters and “super-calf embryos,” for sale through its affiliated planners.

In September 1987, the Securities and Exchange Commission filed a civil complaint in U.S District Court in San Francisco alleging that Dohrmann and others violated federal securities laws in connection with one of the business opportunities it was selling.

To settle those charges a U.S. District Court judge in San Francisco permanently enjoined Dohrmann from future securities law violations.

From mid-1987 until mid-1988, Invest America sold about \$3 million worth of unsecured bonds through its affiliated financial planners to about 233 investors nationwide.

In 1991, a federal grand jury indicted Dohrmann following a three-year investigation by the FBI, the Securities and Exchange Commission and the U.S. Attorney’s office in San Francisco.

Dohrmann was ultimately convicted on 16 counts.

At some point, Dohrmann began calling his company “IBI Global,” which is only slightly less redundant than IBI Global Worldwide. You can also read firsthand accounts of interacting with IBI Global [here](#) and [here](#).

Undeterred, Dohrmann’s IBI Global company morphed into what is now known as [CEO Space](#). The Madison, Alabama based company with satellite groups scattered around the U.S. bills itself as “The Ultimate Resource for today’s CEO” and “a new model for executive training.” If you take some time to peruse companies and individuals that are affiliated with CEO Space (formerly IBI Global) you quickly see that it is a collection of motivational hucksters with a penchant for jargon, but meaningless, slogans. And then there’s UAH. A major accredited public university being used as the sole beacon of credibility by a company most reputable institutions wouldn’t touch with a ten foot pole. Who do you think is getting the better deal in that relationship?

Recently [CEO Space has been pitching](#) a “[Sovereign Nation Program](#), which is designed for heads of state to purchase for their economic development.” It claims that the program “helps develop real businesses that will generate \$100 million in tax base over the next 24-36 months.” Seems to be a very direct and difficult to substantiate claim. The program is only a week, but have no fear!

For the host nation a week may not seem like enough time to host a program that will teach business leaders advanced collaborative techniques at a university level, MBA based forum. The solution, however, is simple. [SuperTeaching](#). [SuperTeaching](#) was invented by Berny Dohrmann and is endorsed by the University of Alabama Huntsville.

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[SuperTeaching](#), itself, lends to the further economic growth of a country over the long run. When schools set up [SuperTeaching](#) labs and use these methods to teach young students, the results are the addition of citizens that are more knowledgeable and educated at a higher level. This, in and of itself, will contribute to the economic development of a nation because of the likelihood that these same people will go on to manage businesses in a more efficient, growth-oriented manner or even build and grow their own businesses, which further maintains and stabilizes economic growth.

Just the thought of such an individual spreading his ideas on free enterprise and entrepreneurship... [Shaking head in disbelief] And the grandiose, unproven claims about the “endorsed by the University of Alabama Huntsville” Super Teaching program... [Grrrrr]

Dohrmann uses a version of the three screen arrangement at his seminars and [claims to have patented the system](#). [A search of the US Patent Office](#) for “Dohrmann” as either inventor or assignee of any patents yielded no results attributable to Bernhard Dohrmann.

There is absolutely no peer reviewed literature indicating whether Super Teaching is effective. On the “Research” page of the UAH Super Teaching website there are two documents listed. One is a [paper written by Dr. Lee Pulos](#). Pulos is a “best selling mind trainer” that [has been affiliated with Dohrmann’s IBI operation in the past](#), hardly making him an unbiased academic offering up an honest assessment. And his paper has never been subjected to the rigors of review by any of his peers. The second piece of “research” listed is merely a [description of a study](#) being conducted by a doctoral candidate at UAH. Maybe I’m viewing it with a jaundiced eye, but it seems to me that the study certainly intends on proving the Super Teaching concept and not dispassionately assessing its merits.

Prior to UAH’s involvement two Super Teaching classrooms were established, one at an elementary school in Michigan and the other at a community college in Utah. The systems in each location have languished. An employee from Michigan said it was fun for watching dog sled races, but the company stopped supporting it. The equipment was provided to them free of charge. The community college found the technology difficult to promote because of the background of the company (imagine that!). Furthermore, their representative pointed out that the elaborate hardware arrangement they acquired with a grant can be displaced using a modern laptop. Either no research was performed in either location or whatever data was collected may not have supported the claims and was subsequently buried.

I contacted the UAH Super Teaching office to find out more about Super Teaching. UAH has entered into a “reverse technology transfer” between UAH, Dohrmann’s company, and a third company that would resell the final product. Profits would be split between the three. The original Super Teaching equipment was gifted to the university. UAH has performed renovations to the Salmon Library to create the “Super Teaching Living Laboratory” and have dedicated resources to update the technological components that comprise the system. The UAH representative admitted there is a dearth of research, although he said Dohrmann’s company had a “good deal” of research. The school asked Dohrmann to remove his research from the internet and redirect his various Super Teaching websites to the UAH domain. When asked if the school was aware of Dohrmann’s

“colorful” past the representative was quick to say the school was aware and that their lawyers carefully reviewed all agreements. Supposedly, UAH will have their final product ready by the end of the year.

Personally, I find the arrangement disturbing. First is the very relationship with someone as unseemly as Dohrmann. Reputable universities should avoid business dealings with twice convicted businessmen by all means. The *UAH website's* [interest form](#) (PDF version [here](#)) includes an option to indicate that you are interested in a CEO Space seminar. Is it really appropriate for the university to be driving business to Dohrmann's company? Second is the blind embrace for what is a completely unproven technology. Universities should be performing research on such systems, not participating in a rush to market before a single scholarly paper has been authored. Did they consider the “cost” of going down this path - using the school's reputation as collateral - to field a system that, as a lay observer, seems so unbelievably ill suited for a class environment?