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Manhattan Media exec seeks mayoralty

Surprise entry won't be like Bloomberg. Nor will anyone, it seems.

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He's a media executive running for mayor, but Tom Allon is no Michael Bloomberg.

While that may not be all bad—the sentiment in political circles is that voters won't elect a Bloomberg type in 2013—the 49-year-old chief executive of community newspaper group Manhattan Media has many of Mr. Bloomberg's original challenges and none of his advantages.

Mr. Allon is virtually unknown, has no institutional support and has never run for office. And he doesn't have tens of millions of dollars to spend on a campaign.

SKEPTICISM PREVAILS

Mr. Allon is billing himself as business's candidate, but business leaders did not rush to embrace his entry into the race last week. “No one from the business community has emerged yet as a candidate that seems likely to attract the kind of support that Mike Bloomberg had,” said Kathryn Wylde, president of the Partnership for New York City.

Mr. Bloomberg showed how a wealthy businessperson could succeed in politics. But outside of supermarket magnate John Catsimatidis, who is considered a long shot for the mayoralty, no one seems likely to embrace the Bloomberg model in 2013.

Citigroup Chairman Richard Parsons, whose name was floated in the past, is not interested in running, an executive said. Former New York Stock Exchange Chief Executive Richard Grasso has said he would run if former Gov. Eliot Spitzer does (and Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly does not), but that's an unlikely scenario. “I think people are doubtful that there is someone else who could run as a business candidate,” said one executive.

Times have also changed. In 2001, voting two months after the Sept. 11 attacks, New Yorkers embraced a levelheaded manager who offered stability during uncertain times. But Mr. Bloomberg's approval ratings fell after he extended term limits to seek re-election in 2009 and have not recovered. His unpopularity could dampen the chances of a business candidate as voters look for someone more like them.

Moreover, Gov. Andrew Cuomo has shown New Yorkers that a traditional politician can be effective on business issues.

“I don't think you have to come from a business background or be a business owner, you just have to be smart and listen to your trusted advisers who know the business community,” said Nancy Ploeger, president of the Manhattan Chamber of Commerce, which does not endorse candidates.

Mr. Allon, who lives on the Upper West Side with his wife and three children, hopes to prove he is competitive by raising as much as \$1 million by the end of the year. While he is just getting started, his potential opponents in the

Democratic primary have been fundraising furiously for a while.

In the past six months, City Council Speaker Christine Quinn hauled in \$1.3 million, city Comptroller John Liu nearly \$1 million, Public Advocate Bill de Blasio \$675,000 and Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer \$650,000. William Thompson, who lost to Mr. Bloomberg in 2009, raised \$250,000.

Mr. Allon does have the potential to connect with entrepreneurs. He has grown his business tenfold in the past decade and has 120 employees. He complains that the city harasses business with taxes and fines and says proposed living-wage and sick-pay mandates would make it harder for employers to provide jobs and benefits. Small merchants may see a kindred spirit.

APPEALING TO ENTREPRENEURS

“When I'm looking at candidates, I'm looking at the needs of small business because I'm a small businessman,” said Bob Schwartz, who owns Eneslow shoe stores. “As a retailer in multiple boroughs, I need someone whose perspective is not just Times Square and Wall Street.”

But Ann Kayman, who owns the New York Grant Co. and once worked for the city Economic Development Corp., said she will back Ms. Quinn, who she believes can navigate the city's bureaucracy and thorny politics.

“She brings both experience and business sensitivity to the job,” Ms. Kayman said. “And she's no pushover, either.”

Mr. Allon will argue that he has the requisite experience, having founded political publications *City Hall* and *The Capitol* and led efforts to establish two public high schools. He contends that after a dozen years under a billionaire mayor, the city would be better off electing a journalist-turned-publisher than returning to career politicians. It may be the toughest sell of his career.

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