

Miami entrepreneurs grabbing powers of the Web to create...



Photos by Maxine Uddan

BY YUDISLAIDY FERNANDEZ

Miami is home to risk-taking entrepreneurs who are successfully and rapidly building Web-based businesses.

From a hotel booking service to electronic medical records and receipts organizer, these business starters chose to develop their big idea using technology and the power of the World Wide Web.

Bob Diener, co-founder of hotels.com, is focusing on a new website, getaroom.com, where he takes hotel booking to the next level.

The Miami native launched his first website in early 1996, first named hoteldiscounts.com, which really took off once the Internet became interactive and customers could instantly get booking confirmation.

"That was the Industrial Revolution for us, it became instant," said Mr. Diener, president of getaroom.com. "You would sell a product and

THE BEST OF
MIAMI
2011
BEST ENTREPRENEURS

give confirmation online. It was a big milestone for us. After that, our business went through the roof."

Soon after, the hotel booking site was renamed hotels.com, it went public in 2002 and he later sold it in 2003.

With a five-year non-compete agreement in place, Mr. Diener had to wait until its expiration to launch its next website, getaroom.com.

The rapidly-expanding company has about 120 employees, with sales and marketing offices in North Miami and call and tech centers in Dallas.

With this new online hotel reservations concept, "we created some new systems and ways for consumers to get better deals," he said.

Getaroom.com offers unpublished discounted rates for hundreds of hotels in major US cities, like New York, Los Angeles and Boston. Hotels internationally are also participating, including in London, Paris and Rome as well as some in Latin America.

"We are continuing to expand at a very fast pace," he said.

The system also offers booking options for condo-hotels, villas and houses for big groups and families traveling.

"A lot of these unique properties, in the past, have been difficult to book," Mr. Diener said. "We've made them easy to book."

Mr. Diener took his time to develop strong software development, marketing and concept teams and married those three to develop the foundation of a successful web business, said Kevin Levy, chair of the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce's Technology & Bioscience Committee.

Mr. Levy, a shareholder at law firm Gunster, Yoakley & Stewart, also described Albert Santalo, the creator of CareCloud, as an entrepreneur who discovered a niche business and built a plan to fulfill it.

Mr. Santalo won a technology entrepreneur award from the chamber's technology committee last year.

He serves as the chairman, president and chief executive officer of CareCloud, a Web-based medical management software company with 67 employees based in the Blue Lagoon area.




The firm aims to create a practical digital health care system, in which the front-end office functions are integrated to deliver health care software that consolidates management, from data storage to revenue-cycle management.

"CareCloud was funded to be a fast company and to grow very quickly," Mr. Santalo said. "We are right where we thought we would be, but next year might surpass some projec-

Buying or Refinancing...

This is YOUR Time!

Come to TotalBank for the right Home Mortgage to:

-  Purchase a new or vacation home
-  Buy your first home
-  Refinance your existing mortgage.



FREE GIFT!

Deluxe Chrome Key Ring
Free with your Banking Center inquiry

For complete details and expert guidance, call a TotalBank Mortgage Specialist or visit any TotalBank Banking Center.

Why not get started today? This is YOUR Time!

HOME MORTGAGE LOAN DIRECT LINE (305) 982-3100

TOTALBANK
A subsidiary of Banco Popular Español, S.A.

Leading Local Lender

MAIN BANKING CENTER
2720 Coral Way • Miami, FL 33145
Phone: (305) 448-6500
www.totalbank.com

Member
FDIC



Subject to credit approval

14 Banking Centers throughout Miami-Dade County

...hotel booking, receipts organizing, medical records niches

tions."

Demand is high for the next set of products the high-tech company prepares to release, which are more focused on medical records software.

From the beginning, timing was key to executing CareCloud's vision.

"A big part of the success is the vision," Mr. Santalo said. "We had a great vision to what we should do and married that with great execution capability, brought in a senior team to lead the company and have been focused on execution throughout."

This entrepreneur recommends to others pursuing their ideas to take risks, but have a sound plan for execution.

"Becoming an entrepreneur is very much an act of faith — you must have a risk tolerance — but also is an act of study," Mr. Santalo said. "We are constantly studying best practices in entrepreneurship and in what we do and responding to that environment all the time."

Birame Sock, founder and chief executive officer of Miami Beach-based Third Solutions, is reaching success with her company MyReceipts.com.

The 35-year-old has been developing this concept since 2004 and launched the company in 2007. It has grown from four to 23 employees in the past eight months.

"We have partnerships with manufacturers and brands that can provide coupons based on customers' buying history," she explained. "For the consumer is MyReceipts.com, for the retailer is a neat thing they can offer the consumers, like coupons."

Ms. Sock is an inspirational person, said Susan Amat, executive director of the University of Miami's The Launch Pad, a program that offers career guidance, resources and advice to entrepreneurs, innovators and inventors.

"To be a female in the techy world in Miami," Ms. Amat said, "to be able to do that is unheard of."

Ms. Sock met Ms. Amat when she was attending the University of Miami to study computer science, as she was not in the Launch Pad program.

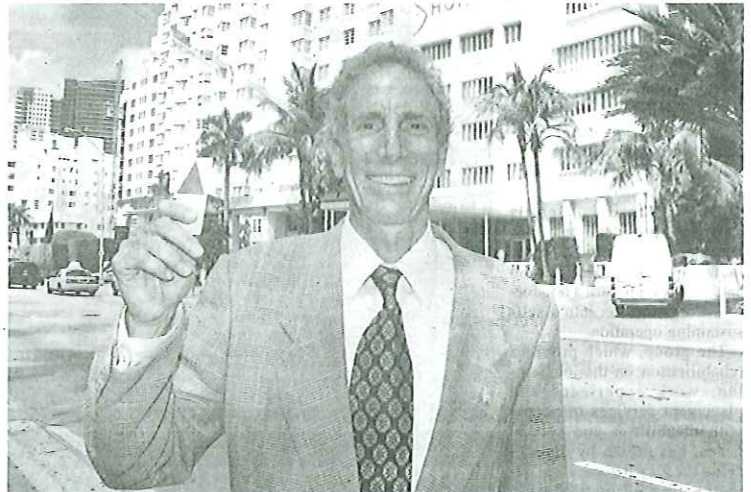
Then she moved to California and started a company in Silicon Valley that she later sold to return to Miami.

What drove Ms. Sock to start this receipts business was that, as a consumer, she said she felt having all her receipts online could be a good organizational tool. Plus, tracking consumers' purchasing history could help retailers reach their customers with discounts and promotions.

With this concept, consumers who make purchases at participating retailers will provide either a number or a card to have receipts forwarded to their account on MyReceipts.com, rather than getting a printed receipt that's likely to end up in the garbage.

The first retailer on board is organic grocer Whole Foods Market, with 6,000 participating customers at a single store.

Conversations are under way with several supermarkets and large retailers, including apparel and electronics, to get them on board.



Bob Diener is focused on a new site, getaroom.com, where he aims to take hotel bookings to a new level.



Albert Santalo, an award-winning entrepreneur, aims to create a practical digital health care system.

SUMMER EXHIBITIONS AT THE PATRICIA & PHILLIP FROST ART MUSEUM



Luo Brothers, *Welcome the Famous Brands to China*, 2002-2008, Painted copper, 65-3/4 x 22-7/8 x 30-1/4 inches, Courtesy of the Artist

On View — *East / West: Visually Speaking*, The South Florida Cultural Consortium; *Who's Counting and Temporal State of Being* by David & Hi-Jin Hodge; *Rise of an Empire: Scenes of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95* and *Tribute to Japanese Splendor: The Art of the Temari*



http://thefrost.fiu.edu | 305.348.2890
10975 SW 17th Street | Miami, Florida | 33199
Free and open to the public.



Find us on Twitter and Facebook



4000 PONCE de Leon

The most DESIRABLE BOUTIQUE OFFICE BUILDING in Coral Gables

- Class A office units are now available, ranging from 1800 to 8000 square feet.
- Superb location: adjacent to Village of Merrick Park, with high end retail and a variety of restaurants.
- Immediate access to US-1.
- Coral Gables trolley stops at site
- Dramatic lobby

Exclusive Agent:



William H. Holly
305.351.2453
william.holly@cushwake.com

Jon Blunk
375.533.2893
jon.blunk@cushwake.com