

Blueprint for Success



Here, the USATODAY.com Small Business Center profiles a successful small business, its owners and how they achieved their dreams.

This month: In 1989, Brett Beveridge began selling wireless products out of a van in Miami. He faced the challenges of a struggling economy and low consumer acceptance of cell phones. Despite those challenges, Let's Talk Cellular and Wireless has now grown to more than 260 retail stores and 1,000 employees. Late last year, Brett took the same young, entrepreneurial spirit he used to found Let's Talk Cellular and Wireless to start a new sister company, LetsTalk.com.

What exactly does Let's Talk do?

LetsTalk.com offers consumers a customer-friendly place to research and purchase the largest selection of wireless products and service plans online. Launched in December, this online wireless superstore simplifies and streamlines the education and buying process for consumers, who are often overwhelmed by the sheer volume and complexity of cell phones and service plans on the market.

The 266 brick-and-mortar Let's Talk Cellular and Wireless stores across the country also provide the same detailed attention to customers needs and selection of cell phones and accessories.

Just how did Let's Talk evolve?

In February 1989, the company I founded began selling cellular phones and accessories out of the back of a van at crowded parking lots and various high-traffic shows open to the public. We lived and breathed our corporate philosophy, "we're mobile because you are," by taking our operation on the road and selling in crowded areas.

Nine months after we began selling cell phones from vans, we opened the first Let's Talk Cellular and Wireless store as our concrete retail operation. In addition to continuing to help customers select cell phones ideal for their lifestyles, our first store that opened a decade ago

in Dadeland Mall, Miami, also now helps advertise our online superstore, LetsTalk.com.

How long before you realized it would succeed?

Within just a few months, we emerged as one of the largest cellular phone dealers for Bell South in the South Florida Market. We grew quickly and now have more than 260 stores in the U.S.



Why did you choose this service?

Wireless communications was the "next big frontier" back in 1989, and I feel no differently today. We are on the verge of a great new wireless world as wireless phones gain features such as GPS location-based services, Web access and even digital cameras. I'm more excited today about the opportunities than I was back in 1989!

Even more significant to me was how inconvenient and confusing it was for consumers to know everything they needed to about cell phones to make a satisfying purchase. Then and even now, the average consumer often doesn't know if a cell phone is right for them or who to turn to for honest answers to their questions.

How did you finance this business?

Initially for Let's Talk Cellular and Wireless we used \$20,000 in cash and credit card financing, hence the reason we kept our overhead minimal by operating out of a van. Our van was our office and we customized it as a mobile retail operation and office. When people asked to come and see "our office," we simply arranged an appointment and drove our office to them.

Financing LetsTalk.com was a different story: Along with a small dedicated team, including LetsTalk.com, CEO Delly Tamer, we raised more than \$20 million from national venture capital firms, including Brentwood Venture Capital, Accel Partners, H.I.G. Capital Management and Goldman Sachs.

How long do you plan to continue with your business?

Until my newborn daughter wants a Disney phone of her own.

What is one of your worst memories in starting your business?

At Let's Talk Cellular and Wireless, the worst memory occurred years

ago when a company owing us over \$250,000 for phone commissions declared bankruptcy. At the time, we were undercapitalized so this was tough.

After deciding to disregard our attorney's advice to file for bankruptcy ourselves, we asked our employees if they would work temporarily for free and asked our vendors if they would wait for their money while we scurried to find a way to pay them back. Truly, it was the one of the worst experiences I have ever had.

No bad memories from LetsTalk.com: What kept me up at night was executing our superior business model and emerging as the dominant wireless retailer on the Internet.

And one of your best?

The best memory was when we heard Brentwood and Accel said they would fund LetsTalk.com and help us bring it to life. But, I have to say that the past 7 months at LetsTalk.com - from forming the company, the launch of the site and the witnessing of the site's success - have all been magical memories.

On the brick and mortar side at Let's Talk Cellular and Wireless, my best memory was when the company went public. It confirmed we had a winning company. Another great memory was realizing our "van days" and the cash crunch period was over as we became the largest independent retailer of wireless products and services in the US with over 1000 employees and 260 stores in 22 states and Puerto Rico.

How many people do you employ?

At Let's Talk Cellular and Wireless, we employ over 1000 nationally and at LetsTalk.com, we have 35 employees.

What are your hours like?

For the past year as the Chief Marketing Officer for LetsTalk.com, I commuted from Miami to San Francisco almost every weekend. After working during the week in the LetsTalk.com San Francisco office, I took a redeye flight home to Miami every Friday night to be home with my family at 9 a.m. Saturday morning EST. Monday mornings, I left Miami at 5:30 a.m. bound for San Francisco and would arrive at the office at about 10:30 a.m. PST. I usually work between 12 and 15 hours a day.

What is your educational background?

Received a BA at the University of Miami in Marketing.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

What spare time? I spend every free moment either talking to or playing with my three daughters and wife.

- [Is your small business a Blueprint for Success? Have a question for a previous Blueprint participant? Write us!](#)
- [Previous Blueprints for Success](#)

-
- [Small Business Center](#)
 -