

# Brad Truesdell

Melbourne, Florida



[Tomahawk Robotics](#)  
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## *Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Brad Truesdell:*

After graduating from the University of Colorado, Brad Truesdell, Florida native and CEO and Co-Founder of Tomahawk Robotics, joined the Navy to pursue a childhood dream of becoming a SEAL. Following his time in the Navy, Truesdell went back to school in 2007 and earned a Masters of Business Administration at Harvard. One of his professors at Harvard sat on the board of Harris Corporation, now L3Harris Technologies, a major defense contractor located in Melbourne, FL. The connection proved fruitful as Truesdell was recruited to work at Harris in 2009.

After nine years with Harris, serving in different roles, including Director of Business Development and Strategy, Senior Sales Manager and Director of Avionics, Truesdell joined forces with his colleague, Matt Summer, and launched Tomahawk Robotics in January 2018. Truesdell

explained his decision to go off on his own and shared the story behind the journey of Tomahawk Robotics.

“My parents were entrepreneurs, so it was always something I was interested in,” he said. “Working for yourself comes with different pros and cons than working for a big business, but it was still something I wanted. I learned a lot during my time at Harris, but I was ready to chart my own course. Matt felt the same way. From the experience we gained during our respective professional careers, we both felt like we had knowledge that enabled us to successfully launch a business.”

Truesdell and Summer both brought with them significant experience in the robotics space, along with a desire to build something special. Their first year in operation, they generated \$600,000 in sales. According to Truesdell, they’re on course to more than triple that figure in 2019.

### Creating a Competitive Edge

“Think of what we do from a business model perspective as similar to Windows for robots,” Truesdell said. “We produce software that controls different robots. The industry, as a whole, has matured such that software can be used successfully across different robotics systems and drive increased capabilities and ease of use. The value that we bring is improving the user experience with and the effectiveness of robots through better software.”

According to Truesdell, the competitive landscape for robotic control software is not overly crowded. The companies that do exist primarily operate in specific niches, such as manipulation and unmanned aerial vehicles. What Tomahawk Robotics provides is a solution that

effectively addresses the needs of users doing outdoor and dangerous jobs with robotic systems.

“We’re providing common robotic control, all with the same software,” Truesdell said. “We provide a common user interface that can be deployed across a whole range of robots. That includes flying robots, legged robots and robotic arms. Compared to our competitors, our ease of use and versatility is our real value proposition.”

Since launching in January 2018, Truesdell and Summer’s biggest challenge has been finding and hiring the right type of talent. According to Truesdell, available software developers are hard to come by. Available software developers with robotics experience are even harder to come by. Beyond that, Truesdell sites the “usual challenges” associated with a new business, such as, “more work than people to do it” as additional challenges.

When it comes to marketing, Tomahawk Robotics, primarily due to the nature of what they’re selling, relies on more face to face meetings than companies operating in other industries. “Our technology is focused on selling to enterprises,” Truesdell said. “With that comes relatively high touch sales. It’s up to us to show people how our technology can change their use of robots and, along the way, improve worker safety and precision. This requires a lot of in-person engagement. This dynamic will endure as long as we have big customers.”

The workforce at Tomahawk Robotics consists of 12 full-time and six part-time employees. According to Truesdell, the culture is defined by hard work and equality.

“All full-time employees have equity,” he said. “We give them a stake in the company and a reason to stay past 5pm. We have very high-end employees capable of doing a lot of things. It’s important that we hold onto them. We also have a very egalitarian structure. We’re open and thoughtful and appreciate everyone’s insight and opinions. I should also point out that, as a veteran, we’ve made it point to hire other veterans. Currently, a third of our full-time team members are veterans. We’re proud of that.”

### Notable Community Support

In terms of community involvement and philanthropic activities, much of Tomahawk’s support comes in the form of internships. Every academic semester they’ve hired an intern from nearby Florida Institute of Technology or from other schools like The University of Florida and The University of Central Florida. They also support various academic projects at Florida Tech.

According to Truesdell, operating in Florida is beneficial for a number of reasons. “From an economic perspective, it’s great,” he said. “The cost of living is low and we’re able to provide a good wage for the area. I’d have to pay more anywhere else for engineering talent. Also, being based in Melbourne, we’ve had reasonable real estate choices to get the business going.”

### What it Means to be a Florida Companies to Watch Honoree

“It all goes back to the efforts we put in as a business,” Truesdell said. “We’ve all pulled some long hours to make this happen. Along the way, we’ve gained notoriety and delivered exceptional products to our

customers. We all collectively share in the success of our company.”

Truesdell continued, “It terms of why we were selected, I think it comes down to our customers and what they’re using our products for. We’re selling software to improve the use of robots for dull, dirty and/or dangerous jobs. Customers include the federal government and large oil and gas companies around the world. We’ve had a tremendous amount of success with ‘name brand’ customers.”

Truesdell shared that success takes a village and that certain people have contributed to Tomahawk in more ways than others. Tony Gannon, with Space Florida, is one such person who supported the company in the beginning and continues to do so today. Other supporters include Tammie Sweet, with GrowFL, Bud Deffebach from Groundswell and Dana Kilborne from the Economic Development Commission of Florida’s Space Coast.

Looking ahead, Truesdell wants to get Tomahawk Robotics to a point where the customer mix is more diverse. As a company that gives equity to all full-time employees, they’re also focused on creating a positive and shared outcome for their entire team. Beyond that, Truesdell is excited to provide great jobs for the residents of Central Florida and continue to contribute to the local community.

### Advice for Aspiring Entrepreneurs

“You certainly have to get your ducks in a row, but the most precious asset we have is time,” Truesdell said. “Using your time to do something you care about and positively impacting people’s lives in a way that you can control is something you’re able to do as an owner. In a business,

where you're an employee, those decisions are made by someone else."

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