

David Wells

Fort Lauderdale, Florida



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Learn about Florida Entrepreneur David Wells:

Originally from Beaver, PA, David Wells, founder of Moving Picture Rental and People First Media, developed a love for the visual arts and a knack for entrepreneurship at a young age. As a fifth-grader, he started a photography business, and a paper route – the latter of which was subcontracted out to his sister to allow him to make a margin while focusing on his photography. When it came time to apply for college, Wells submitted his photography portfolio and won a full-tuition scholarship to attend either The Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale or Pittsburgh. As Wells shared, he chose Florida – a decision that laid the foundation for a successful and inspirational career.

"About a year into that program, I got involved with the school's video

department," Wells said. "It's also when I learned all about the film and TV industry in South Florida. Around that time I shifted my focus from photography to film making. I also landed an internship with Marcus Productions. This opportunity gave me a major head start in the industry."

From that opportunity, a feature film called Cry of the City hired him to work in the lighting department. After the movie, the entire team, including Wells, was handpicked for one of South Florida's most iconic 1980s television series – Miami Vice. He worked on the show for eight episodes and developed an impressive skill set that broadened his connections in the industry. From that point on, as Wells shared, the floodgates opened.

"From there, I worked on film sets all over North America and the Caribbean," he said. "By 1989, I was making, directing, and producing numerous films. It was an exciting time, but it was also an uncertain time. I wasn't fond of the ups and downs of that life. I wanted something with a true sales process that would generate predictable and regular income. That's why I started Moving Picture Rental."

When Wells founded Moving Picture Rental, the competition was fierce, and capital was hard to come by. With \$500 – left to Wells after his grandfather passed – he purchased a TV monitor, his first piece of rental equipment. From that piece came additional equipment, but without a van to move his gear around, Wells would strap it all to the roof of his sedan. He was competing against well-established and multi-generational businesses, but he was undeterred.

"Lots of boots on the ground," he said. "I was doing all my marketing and

advertising, continuing my education, and developing new skills. I bought a MAC SE computer, which felt risky at the time and learned PageMaker – a typesetting program. Using that program, I built ads and put them in periodicals and publications. Growth was slow, but after four or five years, things started to pick up."

From the early 90s until today, Wells grew Moving Picture Rental to a team of five full-time employees and approximately 80 regular subcontractors. He values the inventory in the one to two million dollar range. Wells also continued his work as a producer and director. These efforts resulted in an internationally recognized 35mm feature film, *Jet Dreams*, about jet skis, a documentary about the band U2, *Zoo TV Outside Broadcasts*, which showcased their Zoo tour, and an in-person elevator pitch with Sir Richard Branson.

"In 2004, I got a call from his producers. They wanted me to pitch him and the cast of an unknown season one of a show called *The Rebel Billionaire: Branson's Quest for the Best*. It was Branson's response to *The Apprentice*. They asked me to come down to Fisher Island, get on a yacht and pitch the cast. When I got on to the boat, standing right there in front of me was none other than Richard Branson. We shook hands, and I did my three-minute pitch. I ended up getting selected, and the show producers challenged me to write, shoot, and edit a TV commercial for Virgin Galactic in 72 hours. We stayed up for three days, but we pulled it off."

In 2010, Wells rebranded Moving Picture Rental and Media and formed two separate entities – Moving Picture Rental and People First Media. Since then, through People First Media, Wells has produced and directed

for brands such as PWC, Ultimate Software, Cadillac, and CNN, as well as for regional and national political campaigns. Wells' work on political commercials in 2016 earned him one of six 'Best Congressional Campaign Ads' in Roll Call magazine.

For Wells, the enjoyment of being an entrepreneur in the film industry comes from the many opportunities to create. "I enjoy being a Maker," he said. "I also enjoy working with business owners and entrepreneurs who've never been on camera -- directing them, helping them with their messaging, developing their on-screen image, and helping them develop their brand."

In the future, Wells' goal is to increase People First Media's video production. According to Wells, there's never been a better time to use video to grow your business, personal brand, or both. On the business side, he'd like to continue to grow the rental business and further develop Moving Picture Rental's unique value proposition. Last year they added a location in Ft. Myers and plans include an office in Orlando.

What advice does Wells have for aspiring entrepreneur? "You have to know yourself," he said. "It's important to be super introspective. Figure out what and how you're built. Take time to think deeply if this is for you. Give it a try even if you're on the fence. Remember, you can have a full-time job and a side-hustle. Lastly, it's important to understand that entrepreneurship is for people who can live with a great deal of uncertainty. If you can't live without certainty, entrepreneurship is probably not for you."

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