

# James Stern

Melbourne, Florida



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## *Learn about Florida Entrepreneur James Stern:*

James Stern, Vice President of Trinetics Group, a contract manufacturer providing Plastic Part Development, Assembly, Plastic Welding Services and Equipment, has always been somewhat of an entrepreneur. He became a self-taught web developer in college and eventually turned that into a small business. After graduating from The George Washington University, he ran a software development company, in the video architecture and digital media space, for a few years. He then got involved with a startup that developed video asset ingestion and distribution technologies. That business was acquired in February of last year, leaving Stern to look for new opportunities.

Born and raised along Florida's Space Coast, Stern and his family are very familiar with the local market. They're also very familiar with

manufacturing. Stern's grandfather worked for a medical device manufacturing business in the northeast. He sold that business and moved down to Melbourne in the early 1970s and purchased a marine sales and service company called Keels & Wheels. Stern's father grew up working in that business and much of his knowledge and experience was passed down to Stern.

When an opportunity presented itself to purchase an existing manufacturing operation, Stern and his family jumped on it. "My parents and I talked a lot about buying a business and working together on something," Stern said. "After the company I worked for was acquired, we started looking at a few different business opportunities. We were living in Los Angeles at the time and happened to come across a for sale listing for a contract manufacturing business in Melbourne. The timing of it all was a little odd. We weren't actively pursuing something like this, but with my dad's 35 years of experience in manufacturing, the size of the business, being located in our hometown and the unique niche, it seemed like a great fit."

After doing their due diligence, Stern, his father and mother, purchased Trinetics Group in July of 2017. The sale of the business came with the production customers, equipment, intellectual property, several patents and all the existing employees. The previous owners's wife even stayed on as a Production Manager for the first 9 months.

Trinetics Group mainly works in the bio-medical and automotive filter industries, but Stern admits they've done a little work in most industries. "We've made parts to go into human bodies and also those that go into military trucks," he said. "It's one of the most interesting things about

this business and a big reason why we purchased it."

Their services include engineering design, product development, plastic assembly services, OEM equipment manufacturing, plastic & metal CNC machining and contract labeling services. They provide plastic part development, assembly, plastic welding services and equipment. Their plastic welding equipment technologies include spin welding, ultrasonic welding, infrared welding, and hot gas extrusion welding.

It may sound like a lot, but Stern described their operations as consisting of two main lines of business. "One line is engineering and production and the other consists of customers that want us to build them equipment," he said. "On the engineering and production side, we'll handle the manufacturing of a product with as much or as little touch time as customers would like. The equipment side allows us to pass along our technical expertise in equipment design and manufacturing to customers looking for parts or complete turnkey systems."

Stern explained that Trinetics Group is really good at "joining things together". A lot of their customers need a plastic part welded within their own production line. Trinetics Group hopes to be a service provider from the knowledge side and the equipment side. By building OEM equipment of their own design or by becoming a system integrator of some of the great providers available, they're able to weld two parts and then send them back into the production line, or take from the molder and do whatever plastic welding technology is necessary.

We asked Stern if it was much of a learning curve going from project management and software development to manufacturing. "Absolutely," he said. "It was interesting to see the similarities, but there are way more

differences. It's definitely been a transition, but I've been able to lean on my dad and his experience. My dad actually had me read a book called *The Goal* by Eliyahu Goldratt. It's a novel about manufacturing and the challenges that come with it. It's basically a business self help book wrapped up into a novel. It helps you to understand the principles of manufacturing from a theoretical prospective. It's all about continual improvement."

Looking ahead, Stern wants to pursue growth on both production and equipment manufacturing. He wants to rebuild relationships with customers from the past through outreach with updated solutions and options. Eventually they would like to move into a bigger facility and plan on maintaining their headquarters in Brevard county.

While Stern is optimistic about the future of Trinetics Group, he's also very optimistic about the future of the burgeoning startup scene taking place along the Space Coast. He currently serves as a mentor at Ground Swell, a high-tech incubator and co-working space in Melbourne. "While working in the software startup space, I went through a few accelerator programs and received help from a lot of smart and generous people," he said. "I wanted to return the favor and share my experience with new entrepreneurs. It's also great being involved with Ground Swell because it allows you to keep your finger on the pulse of what's going on in the area. Compared to LA, this area is so much more inclusive. People are more inclined to help others. The startup community is still young and growing and everyone is on an even playing field. The biggest companies at Ground Swell are still willing to help the smallest guy. There's no feeling of a big boys table and a kiddie table."

We asked Stern what advice he would give to entrepreneurs looking to buy an existing business. "Really do your due diligence on the business and what comes with it," he said. "Look very closely at the financials, but also ensure all equipment operates as advertised; especially with a manufacturing business. There are a lot of tangible assets to go through with a fine tooth comb."

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