

John Abbate

Punta Gorda, Florida



[Marketing Alliance, Inc.](#)

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Learn about Florida Entrepreneur John Abbate:

When John Abbate, Founder and President of Marketing Alliance, decided to quit his job to pursue an opportunity without the guarantee of success, he took the "leap" that separates the entrepreneur from the employee. While others simply think, entrepreneurs take action. Abbate shared his entrepreneurial journey, starting with a job in the marketing department for General Motors to founding Marketing Alliance, a marketing agency specializing in solutions for the economic development, tourism, and real estate industries.

"Right out of college, I worked as a Graphics Artist for General Motors in Michigan," Abbate said. "It was a good job, but the quality of life in that part of the country wasn't great and I knew I wanted to move south. Since Florida didn't have a whole lot of opportunity at the time, I ended

up in Mississippi. After working for a variety of advertising agencies, I had an opportunity, in the early 90s, to get into sales. At the time, I was married and we recently had our first child. I was motivated to move to sales to make more money for our growing family. It was also a great opportunity to learn a side of the business where I didn't have much experience. I worked hard and eventually became Sales Manager and helped to grow the company substantially. I primarily worked in their packaging and branding operation. We did brand management for some high profile clients such as Dr. Pepper/Seven Up and Miller Brewing.

Unfortunately, they sold the packaging and branding side of the business and, with that, my path wasn't so clear. That's when I first thought about going off on my own."

At the time, Abbate's wife didn't work and he had three kids in private school. Going off on his own was a tough decision, but he was duly motivated because of his personal life. After launching the business in June of 2001, Abbate worked for two straight years without a single day off. He leveraged the relationships he'd built over the years and slowly but surely, business picked up. After starting as more of a 'packaging design' company, Abbate made a crucial pivot that really took the business to the next level.

"I overheard a client we worked with talking to an architect about a big mixed use development he was working on," Abbate said. "He asked if we could use our 3D technology, that we originally used for package design, to do 3D renderings of the architecture and virtual build-outs of developments. I wasn't sure if we could do it or not, but I told him we'd figure it out. I immediately saw the demand for these guys to help them better envision large mixed-use developments. That's when I started to

shift our focus from packaging design into commercial and economic development type work."

Abbate began working with large developers and those in the commercial real estate sector. He also, after receiving some great advice from his CPA about not putting all of his eggs in one basket, diversified his offerings to include working with municipalities across the country. These groups are constantly vying for new businesses and industries to set up shop in their regions. Abbate's services could help them get the attention they needed.

"Communities all across America are always looking for new business," he said. "They're looking to improve their tax base, the lives of their citizens and to bring in better jobs. We began marketing ourselves as a resource for communities. Our goal was, and still is, to help them compete and win projects."

Marketing Alliance was originally headquartered in Jackson, MS. Abbate grew the business, in part, thanks to a strategy of concentrating on a four-hour drive radius around Jackson. Once he sold and prospected within that radius, he'd expand another four hours out. Eventually they added a second office in Tulsa, OK, and then a third office in Charlotte, NC. Seven years ago, the amount of business Abbate was doing in Florida warranted a move to the Sunshine State. Today, Marketing Alliance has clients in 22 states and works with a majority of the counties in Florida. Abbate shared what he enjoys most about his line of work and what the future holds for Marketing Alliance.

"I really enjoy helping communities that feel like they're never in a position to win anything," he said. "Helping them to create their vision

and to see that they can win big projects is very rewarding. I'm working now more than I ever have, but it doesn't feel like work because I love it so much. Looking ahead, we're planning on opening a new office in Texas in June. They have some really innovative tax options that allow citizens to pay, by way of a small tax, for things like economic development. We want to be in a better position to take advantage of some of those opportunities."

What advice does Abbate have for aspiring entrepreneurs? "The harder you work, the luckier you get," he said. "It's not easy and you'll work more hours than you ever have in your life, but if you want to change your level of success and your environment, you have to work hard. Also, don't put all your eggs in one basket and really think twice about having a partner.

As soon as you bring someone else into the picture, it will complicate things. Lastly, take the time to do things like send out hand-written cards and pick up the phone to call people. On several occasions, we won business because we took the time to do those things. Don't dream small. You'll spend as much time on getting a 'whale' of a client as you would on a small mom and pop. Dream big."

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