

Joseph Boutin and Cary Sobel

Orlando, Florida



Three Two One

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Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Joseph Boutin and Cary Sobel:

For partners Joseph Boutin and Carey Sobel, and the high-profile clients that utilize their services, Three Two One is more than just another digital marketing agency. The way they incorporate technology solutions and the collaboration between their creative, data and technology departments, allows for a more holistic approach than traditional agencies. Boutin and Sobel shared the Three Two One story, what they've accomplished in the last five years and their vision for the future.

“Three Two One was unofficially founded in late 2012,” Boutin said. “At the time, it was just me and I was more of a freelancer. It wasn’t until the second quarter of 2013 that we became official. Prior to Three Two One, I worked as part of the on-air production team at the Golf Channel. In my free time, I started building Three Two One. Before the Golf Channel, I

worked for an agency and before that I was with ESPN. Experiencing the differences between corporate life and agency life really gave me a good perspective on where I wanted to take Three Two One."

Boutin shared that the impetus for his decision to leave the Golf Channel and launch Three Two One was an entrepreneurial spirit combined with his desire to break free from the corporate red tape to pursue new projects.

From Startup to Second-Stage

"The corporate world taught me the business side of things, but you can't really do all the things you want to do and it's easy to become complacent," Boutin said. "I knew I wanted to get back to the agency world. I was also getting some notoriety from the clients I was doing freelance work for. An opportunity came along to do some additional freelance work for a large client and, feeling like it was the right time, I took a leap of faith. Even though my wife was six months pregnant with our son, I put in my two weeks' notice. It wasn't the most ideal time to start a business, but I'm a risk taker and, for those that know me, I'm very impatient. I was also very confident because of my past experience and education through Full Sail. I had the tools and knew the people to put those things together. It was a calculated decision."

Sobel and Boutin hooked up in October of 2013. They collaborated on previous projects and represented a true yin and yang relationship. As Chief Strategy Officer, Sobel handles business development and client relationships. He's the UCF grad with a business and entrepreneurship background. Boutin is the Full Sail graduate with an eye for creativity. Together, they formed a synergistic partnership to provide an array of

clients with a comprehensive set of services.

"Before Three Two One, I was a bit of an entrepreneurial nut," Sobel said. "I owned a DJ and mobile entertainment company. I was doing some residential real estate. I had a small agency where I worked with other contractors to fulfill jobs. I had also recently sold a restaurant. It was great timing to partner with Joe. He and I had a solid plan for the future of Three Two One."

Looking back on things, Boutin admits that his business acumen wasn't as high as he would have liked for it to be, but for things like payroll, taxes, administration, HR, process and procedures and business development, Sobel more than picked up the slack. He put in place systems, policies and procedures that allowed Three Two One to increase its pace from a trot to a gallop. Other early hurdles included talent acquisition challenges associated with being a startup and scaling a business that's 100% service based and built on strong personal relationships.

Keeping a Competitive Edge

"It was and continues to be a balancing act," Sobel said. "Early on, we bootstrapped everything and were price conscious about labor costs, but client demands forced us to invest in strong talent. We hired smarter people than us and didn't tell them what to do. We have 33 employees. That's a lot of weight on our shoulders. Nevertheless, we're keeping our heads down, we're growing organically and we're really starting to hit our stride."

A pivotal moment for Three Two One came in 2014 when Boutin came

to the realization that, while building brands, websites and content was something they did very well, clients were not going to pay for their services without seeing a tangible return on their investment. Boutin shared this realization with Sobel and a plan was formed to evolve Three Two One into a true digital agency that incorporated technology with its service offerings.

"I think we were one of the first agencies in Orlando to hire a Digital Strategist," Boutin said. "We're seeing the traditional advertising agency model die. What we're trying to do is revolutionize the company by diving into technology, adopting technology and consulting with our clients on various technologies. The challenge today is, how we continue to evolve from a standard digital marketing agency into a more revolutionized one that incorporates technology."

As previously mentioned Three Two One maintains its competitive edge over competitors by offering a truly integrated approach. According to Sobel, many local agencies have pre-packaged solutions and are often bidding against one another for jobs. With their holistic approach, Three Two One is able to build custom plans based on the specific needs of the client.

"Every department collaborates based on what a business tasks us with," Sobel said. "In most cases they're trying to get from X to Y in revenue. We see ourselves as a stand in Chief Marketing Officer capable of building a marketing plan alongside their stakeholders to help them reach their goals. We then provide our clients with quantified metrics to show actual results. We also maintain our edge by providing our clients with software solutions. Due to operational inefficiencies, it was taking

one client up to 4 hours to bring in a sale. We built them custom software to reduce that time to 45 minutes. We're now selling that software for other companies. Clients can basically hire the people in our technology department to build software for them or we can incubate projects in our agency. As you can see, we're way more than just leads and great websites. We're focused on the entire picture for our clients."

According to Boutin, who officially serves as CEO, his main focus is on the brand, external relationships and the culture of the organization.

Most of the employees have grown with Three Two One and feel immensely connected to the evolution of the brand. The office itself has your traditional digital marketing agency amenities, but to Boutin, the culture goes way beyond ping pong tables, hammocks, happy hours and free snacks. "It's feeling that you're learning, growing and that you have a purpose," he said. "We give all of our employees, regardless of their level of experience, a sense of purpose and ownership in what they do. We want to see them strive to be better. Between our team building events, open floor space and great vibe, we feel that we're creating an environment that's conducive for making that happen."

Notable Community Contributions

In terms of philanthropic activities and community involvement, Three Two One is extremely committed and proud to support the Central Florida community. They make annual donations to the UCF Excellence Fund, which is used to support school athletics. They also donate money to The Hope Foundation, a non-profit that supports people fighting cancer and heart disease. In the past, they've done charity walks

and currently work with the Ronald McDonald House by offering creative and marketing services at little or no charge. They've also done similar work for the America Heart Association. Currently, Sobel and Boutin are working on putting together a 501(c)(3) called Super Hero Princess Foundation to help mother's dealing with the financial, physical and mental weight that comes with battling cancer. The campaign was inspired by the passing of Boutin's mother.

What it Means to Be a Florida Companies to Watch Honoree

"It's a really cool accolade for us," Boutin said. "Knowing how big the state of Florida is, and the massive amount of innovative companies in the state, for us to be recognized is huge. It's really an accolade for what Carey and I and the team has accomplished in just over five years. This award proves we're doing something right. Also, what's nice is that it's not just awarding our marketing related work. We're being honored as a Florida company doing its part to strengthen the economy. This is an award I'll hold dear when the company goes through its ups and downs.

It's a high point I'll be able to look back on."

In terms of why we were selected, I think it has to do with our plan to evolve into an agency that's looked at as strategists, innovators and one that incubates and/or develops ideas for ourselves and the partners we serve. Our hope for the future is that the agency transcends to a place where really innovative things are being built and also innovative ideas are supported with the devices that are coming out. We want to make a dent in terms of how marketing and advertising will be perceived in the future. We want it to be part of everyday life, not an annoyance."

Sobel added, "Our website tells an incredible story. We've grown

tremendously over the past four years. We've gone from \$110,000 to \$8 million in revenue. I think this, combined with our young culture, the fun we're having and the dynamic projects we're doing for some big clients is what caught the attention of GrowFL."

Advice for Aspiring Entrepreneurs

Boutin and Sobel both offer some great advice for aspiring entrepreneurs. "If someone has the entrepreneurial spirit and they're stuck in a job they're not happy with, I would say take advantage of your current situation to sharpen your skill set and get things in order before you take the plunge. If you have the tools and knowledge, the rest will fall into place. You also have to be as comfortable with failing as you are with succeeding."

Sobel added, "Without question, whatever you're doing, you have to have passion. Find your passion. If not, what you do will be a job. I don't ever feel like I'm working. That's because it's challenging, I love my team and I love what I do. The second thing is to see your life as a series of experiences and look at your failures as lessons. Everything you go through, you gain knowledge from and will ultimately become well-rounded."

Awards and Recognition

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