Matthew Zimmerman

Fort Walton Beach, Florida

Beast Code, LLC

Personal LinkedIn Profile

Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Matthew Zimmerman:

After graduating from The University of West Florida with a Computer Science Degree in 2013, Matthew Zimmermann, co-founder, majority owner and CEO of Beast Code, accepted a full-time position leading a team of engineers building modeling and simulation software for a defense contractor. After a year of full-time employment, and three previous years working as an intern for the same company, Zimmermann and his entire team decided to take their talent, desire to help warfighters and vision to build a more nimble and agile defense contractor and launched Beast Code. Zimmermann explained that decision and shared the journey from corporate employee to innovative entrepreneur.

From startup to second stage

"We were building innovative products, but the company structure and culture was very corporate," he said. "It wasn't the best fit for us. There was a chain of command to follow, things moved slowly and, as a result, it was hard to make quick changes. With Beast Code, we wanted a software company that allowed us to move fast. If we need a new piece of hardware, we want to buy it today, not wait around for it to be approved. Some of things we've done, and had to do after we launched, involved taking risks. These are things we wouldn't have been able to do at a traditional company."

Regardless of your skills, drive and optimism, leaving a steady job, and a steady paycheck, and venturing into the world of entrepreneurship can be a daunting proposition full of customary and unique challenges. Zimmermann shared that, while it was nerve racking, he was confident in his team and their collective abilities. Nevertheless, there were challenges and a learning curve for Zimmermann who, for the first time, had to find the ideal balance between running a business, leading a team and working as a software engineer.

"I definitely experienced a CEO learning curve," he said. "Lots of rules and regulations, understanding what you can and can't do, figuring out how to lead a company, running a business and all the things that come with it. In the early days, getting traction was a challenge. When we started Beast Code, I was only 23 years old. Most of the business leaders we deal with are much older. Getting them to trust such a young kid was tough. It took time to build our credibility, but we've stayed the course and continue to scale. Last year, we had $2.5 Million in gross revenue. This year, we're projecting $7 Million. After four years as CEO,

I'm much more confident in my abilities, but every day is still a learning opportunity."

Keeping a competitive edge

Beast Code builds virtual environments for the military, specifically the U.S. Navy. They develop 3-D representations of ships that act and operate like the real thing. These environments are used for training and analysis. If a sailor needs to maintain something on the ship, he or she can use the tablet to access a video tutorial on how to do that, identify its exact location and utilize 3-D learning to get the job done quicker and more effectively. Beast Code's amazingly accurate 3-D depictions of real environments, and the tools they've built to automate construction of these environments, is what gives them a competitive edge over their competition.

"A lot of other companies do this by hand," Zimmermann said. "They bring in artists to develop the environments. We've figured out how to use software to build these applications instead of having someone else do it. As a result, we're faster and we save our customers money."

After starting with seven employees, Beast Code now employs 52 with future plans to add more. They recently made an announcement to Governor Rick Scott that they'll be adding 40 new jobs over the next couple of years. Their goal is to have 100 employees by 2020. The workplace environment and culture is more reminiscent of a Silicon Valley software company than that of a defense contractor. In fact, The Economic Development Council of Okaloosa County calls it 'Silicon Beach'. The majority of the workforce sits in big open areas, the entire office layout is very open, they have a Marvel comic book theme

throughout the office, free snacks, drinks and coffee, catered lunches and they host many offsite events, like hatchet throwing. According to Zimmermann, it is a laid back environment, but everyone understands they're all contributing to something very important.

Notable community contributions

In terms of community support and philanthropy, Beast Code is very involved in Science, Technology, Engineering & Math (STEM) efforts throughout the county. They support a local foundation focused on STEM and regularly host teachers as a way to empower them with the knowledge to teach students to get STEM jobs. Beast Code is active in other events and organizations including The Game Changer Event, which uses app-controlled robots to get middle school kids interested in STEM and The Congressional App Challenge. Zimmermann also sits on industry entrepreneurial panels and volunteers his time to talk with high school students about software engineering and related jobs. Beast Code even supports Zimmermann's Alma Mater, The University of West Florida, by hiring junior programmers.

What it means to be a Florida Companies to Watch Honoree

"It means we're doing something right," he said. "We've had explosive growth over the last few years with a heavy focus on culture, happy employees and happy customers. The answer to all of these questions about if we're doing the right thing is yes. Our employees are excited and, overall, the award really confirms that Beast Code is a great place to work.

In terms of why we were selected, I think it has a lot to do with the fact

that we're very different than most defense contractors. We're young, quick, growing fast, hiring a lot of employees, bringing in revenue, stimulating the economy and making a big difference for the warfighter. We'd like to thank our employees for being the driving force, the local EDC for nominating us and the City of Fort Walton Beach."

Looking ahead, Zimmermann has an ambitious goal to get Beast Code's technology on to every major Navy platform and eventually to all U.S. military branches. Zimmermann is considering taking their technology to the commercial industry. Regardless of how fast and how wide they grow, Zimmermann stressed the importance of staying focused on providing quality products.

Advice for aspiring entrepreneurs

What advice does Zimmermann have for aspiring entrepreneurs? "You just have to do it," he said. "Make the jump and start your business. Once you get in there, keep your head down and work hard. Another CEO once told me how important it is to keep a level head. Don't get too excited about the good things and don't get too down about the bad things. Stay somewhere in the middle and you'll make better decisions."

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