

Paul Effrem

Port Charlotte, Florida



AlignSign, Inc.

Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Paul Effrem:

Paul Effrem, founder and owner of AlignSign, Inc., started his career working for Control Data Corporation developing mechanical CAD software. When chances to innovate in that job became fewer and farther between and the work became too routine, he went looking for new opportunities.

"I wanted to do something fresh and new," he said. "I had a vision for a parametric design system. I worked with a few other guys on doing some R&D work on newer product concepts. We took those concepts and applied them to the traffic sign design software market to be used throughout the nation for highway and traffic sign design and manufacturing. We developed the software and then it grew from a product to an actual company. Around 1993, we founded the company we later named SignCAD Systems Inc."

After eight years with SignCAD Systems, while still living in Minneapolis, MN, Effrem again got the itch to start something new. Because he wanted to broaden the vision of SignCAD Systems and to expand into other industries instead of just traffic, in 2002, he founded AlignSign, Inc., a software and web development company specializing in custom sign software and custom manufacturing software.

"When I first launched AlignSign, I didn't have many customers," Effrem said. "As a developer, and someone not as comfortable in the sales position, finding new customers and putting myself out there was a challenge. Nevertheless, I did partner up with a company in Minnesota that built 3D printers. I developed programs for their manufacturing systems. That early relationship still continues today."

In 2011, drawn by the warmer weather and other factors, Effrem relocated to Charlotte County. Since making the move, he's focused on growing the business through traditional products and various projects outside his standard wheelhouse.

"In terms of relationships and new business, I look to make sure it's not just a one off sort of thing," he said. "I developed software for a company that does protective coatings for electronic devices. They sell vinyl blanks that protect your cell phone. They're actually cut and applied on the spot, usually at mall kiosks, to prevent the company from having to send out all the various phone configurations. I've developed an exclusive relationship with this company."

Effrem also developed an app, called WayPoint Pocket that lets you

easily save and look up locations through your mobile device's GPS. Looking ahead, he's working to identify other manufacturers in Florida that might be able to utilize his software. Effrem highlights his development speed and ability to flesh out ideas in an effective way as factors that help to differentiate AlignSign from other software development companies.

What advice does Effrem have for aspiring entrepreneurs? "There's validity in being concerned about losing a paycheck when pursuing a path of entrepreneurship," he said. "We all have bills to pay. It's important to consider how you would develop the business on the side at first while keeping your day job. Also, make sure it's something you like and find others to do the things you don't like to do. Finding the right mix of people is key. It can be a difficult formula to create, but it's crucial."

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