

Peter Dyson

Melbourne, Florida



[Modus Operandi, Inc.](#)

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Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Peter Dyson:

While attending Washington University in St. Louis, Peter Dyson, Co-Founder, President and CEO of Modus Operandi, Inc., a high-tech software company serving the U.S. defense and intelligence community and commercial enterprises, was first introduced to software analytics.

His summer-break job with Southwestern Bell had him working on a program to help the company deal with 'third number calling fraud'. As Dyson shared, that experience set the stage for a career focused on using data to uncover and analyze useful trends.

"People would call someone long distance and tell the phone company to charge it to a different number," he said. "This was costing the phone company millions of dollars. My job was to take the data and make sense of it. However, I discovered that getting the data in a form where

you could use computers to analyze it was the most challenging and important part. Once set up properly, the computer could give you tremendous insights.”

When Dyson graduated from college in 1980, he was recruited to join L3Harris, called Harris Corporation at the time. After five years with Melbourne’s largest defense contractor, he was ready to pursue his own business.

“I got the entrepreneurial bug,” Dyson said. “In 1984, myself and two other engineers at Harris formed a company called Software Productivity Solutions. Even though I was right in the middle of working towards my MBA at Florida Tech and working full-time, it was an opportunity we couldn’t ignore. We just went for it. It was an exciting time.”

The three young founders originally based their operations out of a carport in Melbourne. They eventually upgraded to a living room and, several months later, found a small office in Indian Harbor Beach. A few months after that, all three founders were working full-time on the business and the momentum was building.

“Our original plan, based on a business plan I created as a class project for one of my MBA classes, was to create productivity tools for software development,” Dyson said. “However, we pivoted to focus more on working with data. We thought it would be easy to raise venture capital, but at the time, what we were doing wasn’t interesting enough to venture capitalists.”

Dyson continued, “That’s when we decided to focus on going after

government research and development funding. Our first government contract was with an organization that is now known as the Air Force Research Laboratory. That effort, where we developed analytics applied to engineering data to evaluate the impacts of changes to system requirements or designs, planted the seeds of our current focus on analysis of data to support decision processes.”

For Dyson and his co-founders, the late 80s was a time of significant growth and learning about new opportunities. One such opportunity was the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program. The program encourages small businesses to engage in federal research and development work with the potential for commercialization. Despite losing nine proposals in a row, Dyson and his partners never gave up and eventually started to win some SBIR projects.

“By the mid-1990s we were becoming more focused on data-intensive problems and opportunities,” Dyson said. “We also expanded beyond our early work with structured engineering data to work all types of data, as well as to work on problems closer to the pointy end of the spear. In the business world this meant things that impact customer service, revenue, and cost or profit, where we supported customers such as Qualcomm, Florida Power & Light, The Nature Conservancy, The Travelers, UPS, and Time Life. But the lion’s share of our work as has been in support of the US national defense, where we have worked with defense and intelligence customers including USAF, USN, Army, USMC, MDA and DTRA, and many leading defense contractors.”

Dyson continued, “For these customers, many of our efforts are directly in support of our warfighters – providing solutions to arm Commanders

with the best possible knowledge for achieving mission success. One example is our work on the Army's aerial sensor platforms, such as Guardrail Common Sensor which we have supported since 1995, applying our data integration and analysis talents to sensor data for situational awareness as well as to supporting functions such as post mission data analysis and system health & diagnostics."

Software Productivity Solutions eventually changed its name to Modus Operandi. Ten years ago, they moved into their current location on South Harbor City Boulevard. The original ownership structure changed when one of Dyson's partners split off and took a specific product in a separate direction. Over the years, the team has grown to include 35 employees that all receive equity in the company – either through stock or options to buy stock.

For Dyson, who first recognized the power of pattern recognition while learning to play chess as a child, the focus has always been on delivering value to customers by making data smarter to gain insight in support of making better and faster decisions. That approach, however, has been re-focused and re-defined over time.

"We refer to our current state-of-the-art approach as living intelligence, where data is in a form to support both human and machine analytics," Dyson said. "Our customers use our tools both to collaborate with their team members and to orchestrate the teaming of humans with the power of machines to speed the creation of actionable information. These investments resulted in an early product called Wave, and now, the next generation of this technology was released in 2019 as our Movia product for living intelligence. Today, we combine this powerful

software platform with our unmatched human talent to continue to push the envelope for our customers.”

Looking ahead, Dyson and his team are focused on pivoting from deriving a majority of their revenue from service contracts to a business model based on product revenue. The company’s Movia product can be customized to offer solutions for a variety of commercial applications.

What advice does Dyson have for aspiring entrepreneurs debating on whether or not to start their own business? “If you have a lot of doubts, maybe you shouldn’t do it,” he said. “If you decided to do it, it’s important to understand that it will be very stressful. However, once you’ve made the decision to leap, you need to be all in. Another piece of advice is don’t run out of money and don’t rely entirely on banks for loans and help managing your cash flow. Banks can sometimes be fair-weather friends. It helps to have your own ‘war chest’. Also, don’t hide bad news from your customers. Be upfront with them. Nothing will erode trust faster if you hide something. Strengthen trust by giving them the straight story.”

Dyson continued, “The last thing I’ll share regarding advice is my ‘Seven Secrets of a Perpetual Entrepreneur’. Number One: Be adaptable. Number Two: Listen, be honest and do what you say. Number Three: Cash is king, but cash flow is queen. Number Four: Maintain an unfettered faith in the ability to persevere through dark times. Number Five: Don’t do anything you wouldn’t want published on the front page of the paper. Number Six: Stay Focused. Number Seven: Build a solid team.”

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