

Rich Libero

Treasure Island, Florida



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Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Rich Libero:

Originally from New York, Rich Libero, Owner and President of Suncoast Advertising Network, moved to Pinellas County in 2014 for a position with the Women's Tennis Association. A year later, he, along with two other partners, started a sports and media marketing consulting firm called Upside Advisors. When one of Libero's partners left to become CEO of U.S. Rowing, he discovered an opportunity in the world of digital billboard advertising. Libero shared the story behind his journey, including his previous experience as an NHL executive and how his newest venture, Suncoast Advertising Network, is revolutionizing how companies advertise and how they leverage each other's customer base.

"After graduating from Fordham University with a degree in

Communications, I worked as a sports writer for seven years in the newspaper business,” Libero said. “In 1991, a friend helped me land a contract job working on the Prodigy Online Service’s fantasy baseball game – Baseball Manager. At the time, I was working two jobs and discovered that I really enjoyed the office environment and being surrounded by a ton of smart folks at Prodigy. After covering the World Cup in ’94 for USA Today. I quit the newspaper business and ran FoxSports.com from 1996 to ’98. In 1999, I was hired to ‘reset’ NHL.com and spent the next 10 years as an NHL Executive. I earned a reputation as someone who could set up content, creative and sponsorship activation teams and also establish best practices.”

Libero continued, “From there, I went to Comcast in 2008 and established the digital culture for their regional sports networks – Philadelphia was the first. We eventually acquired NBC Sports, where I spent some time before moving to Florida.”

In April 2019, Libero found himself as the only remaining partner of Upside Advisors. Ironically, he discovered his indoor billboard company while catching up with Keith Ritter, the former President of NHL.com.

“At the time, I was actually a finalist for the CEO job for The Society for American Baseball Research,” Libero said. “When I didn’t get the job, I was pretty ticked off – and motivated. Keith and I were lamenting the state of things – he does consulting and franchise sales – and he mentioned a media business in the franchise realm called N-Compass TV. When I looked into it and did some research, I loved the model and decided to buy the Pinellas County region.”

When Libero purchased the Pinellas County territory, he became what N-

Compass TV refers to as a “dealer” – their version of a franchisee. The business model revolves around indoor electronic billboards as a form of advertising and dealers working with “host partners” to “host” the billboards at their place of business.

Libero explained, “We work with host partners that have good traffic flow. For hosting a digital billboard, they receive a package of ads designed to upsell current customers and make them aware of new products or services. We work with them on content, scripts, lead times, audiences and how seasonal population changes over the course of the year will affect who’s viewing the ads. For no charge, our hosts get the services of a creative and digital marketing agency valued at \$10,000 annually. We then monetize the rest of the loop by finding other companies that want to advertise at those locations.”

Libero added, “In addition to the indoor billboards, we also offer a complete suite of digital marketing services. We can do marketing plans for emerging businesses or those that are more established. Our team provides expertise in Google My Business, Social Media, Email/Ad Campaigns, website construction, WiFi/customer login services and gorgeous HD Menu/Information Boards. The core of our business, however, is a growing 40+ screen indoor billboard network that presents weather, fun-facts, news and brands in stunning 15- and 30-second full-motion video ads.”

When comparing Suncoast Advertising Network to other agencies that provide marketing and advertising services, the business is unique in a number of ways. First of all, Libero brings 33 years of major media experience with a deep background in the print, digital and broadcast

businesses. The company also provides boutique, 1-on-1 service and expertise for their clients, putting an emphasis on content, storytelling and operating around a calendar-based mindset. Lastly, their billboard technology is more advanced than their competitors. Suncoast Advertising Networking has the ability to ingest RSS/XML and Social Media feeds to populate the boards with real-time content.

“We also have some Artificial Intelligence capabilities that schedule and purchase ads via programmatic media buying.” Libero said.

After several months of strong growth, and installing billboards at places like medical offices, gyms, sports academies and more, Suncoast Advertising Network reached 40 screens before the COVID-19 Pandemic temporarily shut things down. Nevertheless, business has since picked up and Libero is determined to reach his short-term goals and continue to forge relationships with new host partners.

“I love helping folks take a different perspective on their business,” he said. “Nothing pleases me more than watching a person's face light up with a revelation. We want to provide cost-efficient, effective marketing tools for folks who need all the help they can get. It's a great feeling when we can get it done! Our goal is to expand our billboard network to exceed 100 screens here in Pinellas County. We want to evolve into a business leader and drive the Suncoast Advertising Network to ultimately become a media and content company.”

What advice does Libero have for aspiring entrepreneurs? “Be a blank slate and a sponge,” he said. “Never assume you know it all and don't be afraid to admit to yourself that you don't know it all. Also, learn about the client before you talk about yourself. Along the way, be sure to

balance confidence with humility. Lastly, don't give up. Small boxes and tough times lead to breakthrough innovation.”

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