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Old Friends Join in Media Company

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THE LEDGER

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Meet Tom Reid and JB Thomas - longtime friends, first-time business partners at Blue Sky East.

Their burgeoning venture, Outpost Media, provides a media management and distribution system for hotels and other tourism businesses to better showcase themselves online.

That might include shooting and customizing photos and video for travel websites, consumer devices (such as iPhones and iPads) and social media programs, in addition to keeping up with the evolving technology in each niche.

"What we're trying to do is really be an extension of the hotel, providing an efficient means to distribute their visual content and do so in a way that enhances and allows them to focus on their day job, which is selling hotel rooms," says Thomas, 46.

Thomas and Reid, 46, grew up together outside of Chicago and have known each other since middle school. Outpost is a result of their combined talents.

Thomas, of Fort Myers, is a consultant with more than 25 years experience in Web development and the travel industry. He's worked for large hotel chains and was on the startup team for a major travel website.

Reid has his own production company and has worked in commercial photography and film production since the late 1980s, with a focus on tourism advertising. He recently finished ad campaigns for Seminole and Collier counties.



MICHAEL WILSON / THE LEDGER

Tom Reid, left, and JB Thomas.

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"We've always been friends, and we've always had an interest in photography and travel," says Reid, a Winter Haven resident. "We've been talking forever about doing something. I guess the growth in our development (as Outpost Media) happened when Blue Sky came online, and it was like a light bulb came on."

The duo has been working on Outpost Media for less than a year. They said they hope to finish development of the media management application by November 2011. In the meantime, Thomas and Reid are formulating a business plan for Outpost, working with USF's information technology experts and getting ready to pitch the concept to investors or banks for financing.

Their ideal clients will be small hotel chains or individual properties, and possibly cruise lines and theme parks. Reid says he is already doing commercial photography and video shoots under the Outpost name.

"We're not trying to conquer the industry. We're not trying to be the one utility to do this for everyone. What we want to do, though, is be the best," Thomas said.

Assuming Outpost Media can make it and become self-sufficient, Reid estimates the business would need about six to 12 employees to start. He and Thomas have even bigger dreams for Outpost but don't want to get ahead of themselves.

"We're taking our idea, and we're trying to go as fast as we can to market with it," Reid said. "Our goal is to build a really strong, high-tech business that's here in Polk County."

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