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**FLEXING THE
ENTREPRENEURIAL
MUSCLE**



FLEXING THE ENTREPRENEURIAL MUSCLE

Nick Friedman is hard to miss. You can recognize him by his tan pants, lava-orange shirt and the smile that wraps around his face like a scarf. To the employees operating out of his College Hunks Hauling Junk headquarters in Tampa, Florida, USA, the sight is every bit as common as the palm trees that pepper the local landscape. As the co-founder and president of the largest US-based junk-removal and moving service, smiling has become second nature for the EO Central Florida member ... like breathing, blinking or ruminating about business during a culinary chomp in nearby Ybor City.

And why not? In 10 years, Nick and Omar Soliman—co-founder and CEO of College Hunks—went from college graduates to cornering the market in an ultra-competitive industry. While their peers were hitting the mile markers of a corporate career, the best friends were turning an old cargo van that ran on Metamucil and unleaded into a junk-removal and moving empire. With more than 50 franchises, 500 employees and 150 vehicles, Nick and Omar have redefined an industry through their electric marketing, renowned company culture and innovative approach to business. All it took was passion, persistence, and yes, a lot of muscle.

AN ENTREPRENEURIAL ERRAND

The thought of turning trash into cash started the way most business concepts start: A flicker of an idea, fanned by opportunity, turned into a roaring fire of possibilities. Nick first experienced the entrepreneurial heat when he and Omar led a charge across their high school's football field during the halftime of a rivalry game, a prank that resulted in lemming-like behavior from their classmates, a few too many stitches and the realization of a powerful partnership. From that moment on, Nick and Omar knew that they had the power to influence through action. All they needed was the right outlet. In 2003, they found one. They didn't know it at the time, but their future was arriving on four wheels.

"Omar and I were trying to earn some extra money for school one summer, so we borrowed his mom's beat-up van to pick up junk from one of her clients. It was a simple errand, but we made more money that day than we ever thought we would," said Nick, who went on to make US\$5,000. "We knew that we had stumbled across an awesome business concept, but we didn't know where to go from there.

So we tabled the idea and pursued corporate jobs after college."

As it happened, caging their entrepreneurial spirit didn't last long. After Nick and Omar graduated from college, they took the traditional "9-to-5" route, a respectable path worn well by their parents and peers. Although full-time employment promised security, their intolerable itch to be more, do more, never waned. They had already taken a bite out of the entrepreneurial apple, and they were hungry for another taste. Eager

to become the architects of their future, Nick and Omar exited the world of cubicles and entered an exciting new one. They decided to become entrepreneurs.

"I remember one day during work, I texted Omar and asked him about the business idea we had during that summer break. I wondered what the timeline was for turning the vision into a reality. He texted me back: RIGHT NOW!" said Nick. "From that moment on, we dedicated ourselves to starting a junk-removal business that was unlike any other. We had no idea what it involved, we didn't have business degrees and we had zero experience ... but we had an idea, and that was enough."

THE BIRTH OF A BUSINESS

Free from the shackles of the corporate world, Nick and Omar poured all of their energy into turning their idea—College Hunks Hauling Junk—into a bonafide business. They strived to be different; to offer stress-free service at the hands of clean-cut, friendly and hard-working "hunks," the antithesis of the typical junk hauler. All of the ingredients for success were there: a clever concept, bold branding, a rock-solid vision and a business plan that, a year before, had won first place in the University of Miami's Leigh Rothchild Entrepreneurship Competition, a sign that College Hunks could be more than just a fun idea.

But achieving growth as a bootstrap business wasn't easy. After setting up shop in their hometown of Washington, D.C., USA, Nick and Omar hit the ground running by making every junk haul themselves. Slowly but surely, they inched their way toward a rhythm, securing their first team of junk haulers, buying a few new trucks and purchasing the vanity phone number—1-800-JUNK-USA—from a doctor's office, all of which signaled a start to bigger and better things. During this time, the duo held every position in the company, discovering firsthand what it takes to run and grow an up-and-coming operation.

"We were doing everything ourselves, to the point where we'd be managing paperwork and analyzing billing while we drove to each job site. One time, I was doing a million things at once while driving, and I started to swerve into the other lane. The driver behind us called our toll-free number on the back of the van—which was tied to my cell phone—to report the erratic driving. I listened to her complaints and told her that I'd discipline the driver to ensure it never happened again," said Nick. "It was definitely a crazy time in the business! We probably fired ourselves three or four times in the beginning."



C.J., the official College Hunks Hauling Junk mascot, celebrating with a team of hunks.

That craziness would graduate to greatness. In their first year of operation, after hauling away 4,000 tons of junk, College Hunks raked in US\$500,000. By year two, they had hit the US\$1 million mark. Before long, word had spread about a group of friendly college students that could help move, donate, recycle and dispose of people's items. Business was finally booming, but Nick and Omar were ready for more. Eager to start working on the business instead of always in it, the partners moved to sunny Tampa in 2008, opened a call center and began franchising. It was a big decision that helped College Hunks gain national exposure—Nick and Omar became two of the youngest franchisers in history—and established the company as an industry leader.

"When we started out, Omar and I had crafted a clear vision of what we wanted the company to be, and we've been putting in the work to get there ever since," said Nick. "Franchising was a logical step. We knew that it would be difficult at first, but that through hard work and a commitment to the end goal, we could outperform the competition, turn a greater profit and make a bigger name for ourselves."

They did just that, opening a handful of franchises across the nation, while adding moving services to the mix. Their tremendous growth and success was punctuated in 2009 by an appearance in *Inc. Magazine's* "500 Fastest Growing Companies" list, followed by a spot on several reality television shows, including ABC's "Shark Tank," Bravo's "Millionaire Matchmaker," TLC's "Hoarding," HGTV's "Househunters" and AMC's "The Pitch." Nick and Omar had officially arrived on the refuse scene with distinction, and what set them apart had as much to do with their customer service as their company culture.

"I think what sets us apart is that while we're serious about quality service, we also know how to have fun. When our team members

have a good time, they make the experience more enjoyable for clients," said Nick, who holds a football-inspired meeting at 11:11 a.m. every day, where nominated staff can kick field goals for rewards. "Many companies are afraid to make it fun for their team and clients, so it's one of the ways we stand out from the crowd. It's really played a large role in our success, and it aligns perfectly with our outside-the-box marketing efforts."

THE MAGIC OF MARKETING

The business of removing other people's trash is not an original one. Countless folk have found success hauling the detritus of their communities ... but none of them work hard to make it memorable. That's where Nick stepped in. With the kind of marketing motor you'd need to separate your company from the proverbial pack, Nick adopted an ask-for-forgiveness-later approach that helped establish College Hunks as a polished alternative to the more ho-hum fare the industry had come to know. From the beginning, the company's success was predicated on standing out and relied heavily on word of mouth, encouraged largely by Nick's savvy approach to marketing. By subscribing to an edgier avenue of awareness, Nick was able to create buzz in a crowded market.

"I discovered early on that when you consistently nail guerilla marketing activities, you will build as much—if not more—value in your own community, while at the same time targeting the people who could use your service and getting in front of them in a real and memorable way," said Nick. "Everything we do is about standing out from the crowd, whether it's our service or the way we present our business externally. We're a fun and vibrant company, so our marketing needs to match that."

The examples of Nick's innovative marketing campaigns are endless: He once convinced a police officer that he was picking up trash

“WHEN OUR TEAM MEMBERS HAVE A GOOD TIME, THEY MAKE THE EXPERIENCE MORE ENJOYABLE FOR OUR CLIENTS.”

outside of a new baseball stadium, just so he could park his truck in front of a metro station and garner the attention of a million eyeballs. He once paraded a fleet of junk trucks down the busy streets of Washington, D.C.—their company mascot, C.J., waving at wide-eyed passersby—just to get people talking and Tweeting. He once had his crew drive to airports so that they could wait at arrival gates with company signs in hand. From the get-go, Nick has been relentless, unapologetically motivated and laser-focused when it comes to raising brows through his business ... and it's worked every step of the way.

"We've always been about grassroots marketing. There's no excuse for spending a ton of money on expensive marketing tactics and strategies if you aren't taking care of the basics," said Nick, whose dream goal would be to secure a Super Bowl ad. "The bells and whistles of marketing are fun, and TV and radio ads are tempting, but I've discovered that the ROI is much greater when you put the actual work into doing the basics. It's more efficient and you'll stand out more, too."

Ultimately, what sets College Hunks apart from competitors is not just the flashy marketing or colorful antics that wow clients and critics alike—it's the promise that Nick and Omar aren't just hiring junk haulers to live their brand. They're hiring future doctors, lawyers and business owners, all of whom deliver the kind of quality service that customers have come to expect. In fact, Nick's insistence on hiring "tomorrow's leaders to haul your junk today" has gone a long way in establishing trust in their market, and in alignment with their no-holds-barred approach to marketing, continues to help them make waves in an industry not used to them.

"The real secret to our success is that we have not just one but 500 CEOs. They drive the trucks, haul the junk and answer the phones. They're all leaders, and they're helping us build an empire because they've bought into our vision, value and purpose to 'move the world,'" said Nick. "That gives us the freedom to revolutionize an industry that's built around people."

ONWARD AND UPWARD

A lot has happened since Nick and Omar first put that cargo van into drive and saw a pot of gold at the end of the junk-removal rainbow. Armed with a solid business model, a fun company culture and the kind of customer service people whisper about at water coolers, College Hunks Hauling Junk's future looks as bright as their company logo. As they work toward bigger and bolder things, Nick will continue to leverage the energy and creativity that have come to define his entrepreneurial journey and thriving business. All the while, he'll grow as an entrepreneur and discover new ways to get College Hunks into the minds and garages of customers the world over.

"I still have a lot to learn about entrepreneurship, but no matter how much I learn, I still have to keep innovating. That's what will help us stay ahead in this industry. As for the future, I see our brand blanketing the U.S. and beyond to the point where anyone, anywhere, at any time, can pick up the phone and receive stress-free service right away," said Nick. "We have a lot to look forward to at College Hunks Hauling Junk. We're just getting started!"



(from top to bottom) Nick, with business partner, Omar Soliman; the cargo van that started it all; Nick, at his call center; and hired hunks on the job.



Turning Trash into Cash

Want to learn more about how Nick is using marketing to put his company on the map? Contact him at nick.friedman@chhj.com, scan the QR code at right for a special Octane interview or visit <http://blog.eonetwork.org/nick>.

