



Growing My Own College Education

BY JOE PASCARETTA

What do lawn care, software design, and wolverines have in common? Me, I'm Joe Pascaretta, cofounder of ALPS Lawn Care, ALPS Technology International, and a full time student at The University of Michigan. To say that I stay busy is an understatement. It doesn't bother me though, because being able to handle everything going on in my life, through effective time management, is an entrepreneurial skill I developed early on.

I have always had a passion for following companies and learning from their founders. Biographies, annual reports, and news stories taught me a lot about traits I am now glad I have. My objects of particular interest included the founders of Oracle, Cisco, and Hewlett Packard. What I learned from this "hobby" has been invaluable and spurred me on to reinvesting my income to the successful business we have today.

In 1999 my friend Aaron Downen and I were fascinated with computers and for fun learned software and computer programming. At the age of 11 we developed our first website. When we received positive response due to the professionalism of the site, we decided to enter the website development market.

Our peers thought no one would purchase our services since we were so young. In the preliminary stages of establishing Alps, I sent an email to Aaron saying, "You build a website and I will sell the template and consulting services." The overhead was very low for a start-up company. Because of our youth, we had to do something different from the competition, so we narrowed our profit margin, and offered incentives such as 24/7 customer support, complementary consulting services, and flexible finance options. That, along

with our great products and services, drove Alps into what it is today. If we would have listened to other people's advice, Alps and our successful joint ventures would have never been established.

We began Alps as a website development company, providing Internet solutions to local companies. We also invested in a landscape contractor and horticultural service company. Beginning with a single commercial lawn mower, The Alps Lawn Company is one of Michigan's most prestigious horticultural management companies. We now service over 60 residential and commercial properties, experienced a 239% growth spurt last year, and grossed over 1 million dollars.

Secrets of Success

1. Manage your time well; if you don't it will manage you.
2. Don't listen to detractors because they don't understand your passion or how an entrepreneur thinks.
3. Research those that were successful before you. It is cheaper to learn from others' failures than to make the same mistakes.



Mowing Joe!

I discovered that it is difficult to be taken seriously in business when you are still young. I didn't let this stop me though. In fact, it motivated me to break through this age/image barrier and prove that in fact, I know what I am talking about, and can do what I claim. I never have let detractors slow me down. There will always be people who try to discourage risk taking. Of course, they don't think like entrepreneurs and can't see the benefit of facing the challenge. Facing fear head on is the only way I know to conquer it, so that's what I do.

The benefits reaped from being an entrepreneur are substantial. Of course having a successful business, or two, is fantastic, no doubt about it. In reality, that would probably be enough for me, but I have been fortunate enough to receive even more. I am a recipient of the NFIB's Young Entrepreneur Foundation's Young Entrepreneur Award. Not only did this give me recognition that I am definitely doing the right thing, I also received \$5,000 for college in the bargain. It's a long way from an 11 year old with a lawnmower and it just goes to show it's never too early to get started. □

