

# Tees duo game for a challenge!

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SEAN Crooks and Dave Allanson are living proof that you can survive and succeed in the cut-throat computer games industry.



The two local lads - both Teesside University graduates - have only been in business for three years, but already they've landed a plum six-figure contract with one of the largest computer games developers in Europe.

Not bad for a duo who only established 3rd Dimension Creations Ltd to get experience in an industry where opportunities are hard to come by.

As Dave, born and bred in Acklam, explains: "I did try to get a job but was turned down due to a lack of experience. But how do you get experience if people won't give you a chance?"

"We'd talked about setting up in business before and one night in the pub, we just decided to go for it. ♦?"

The pair met in the final year of their undergraduate course at Teesside University and discovered each shared a passion for computer games software.

But although they had complementary skills - Sean's creativity in art and design blending nicely with Dave's technical ability - they embarked upon their new venture lacking the necessary business acumen to even keep their heads above water, let alone compete with big guns like Nintendo.

"It was an extremely steep learning curve, ♦?" said Sean. "I soon realised I didn't have a clue about managing staff or running the operational side of the business. But having your own company is the best way to learn. ♦?"

The duo also realised that they shouldn't get excited on a handshake - in fact, not until the ink was dry on the contract did they allow themselves to celebrate. Dave explains: "There are some people who say they will do business with you and you never hear from them again. Unless you have a signed contract in front of you, you haven't secured the business. ♦?"

After setting up with the help of a £3,000 start-up grant from the sector champion DigitalCity, the company began carving a reputation for developing computer games software for consoles, PCs and hand-held devices.

One of the first assignments was to create a training game for Richard Hange Associates, which runs training and development workshops for small to medium-sized enterprises).

The game was based on the board game Snakes and Ladders and required answers to a diverse range of scenarios, each of which could be customised for different business sectors.

As the company expanded, Sean and Dave took on more staff. Their first major breakthrough came in March 2006 when Atomic Planet Entertainment Ltd - a large video games development studio in Middlesbrough - approached them to work on Beverly Hills Cop for PlayStation 2.

Sean recalled: "We were given only four months to complete the project so it was a scary ride at times. Our key motivation was that we knew if we could

been done before. ♡?

The company will develop the software, graphics and animation for the game.

And not only does the deal represent their biggest contract so far, but it could push turnover to around £250,000 this year.

They have just moved to new premises at Royal Middlehaven House in Middlesbrough and are looking forward to the future. They remain committed to developing the company's presence in the Tees Valley and are not concerned by plans to create a rival digital hub in Sheffield.

Sean said: "There are a number of these hubs around the UK and we feel there may be some scope for collaboration. 💎?"

It is difficult not to buy into the enthusiasm of these likeable local lads, whose ability to see solutions and challenges rather than problems has brought them a long way, fast.

And during the coming months and years, few would bet against them cementing their reputation as rising stars of the digital business community in the Tees Valley and beyond.

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