

unconventional entrepreneurs

Two computers sit on the main table. Files, folders and notepads are just about everywhere. Behind Charles, the chairman for the meeting, is a library of books. As Charles goes through the minutes of the last meeting and lays out the agenda for the current one, four other Directors - Mark, Andrew, Ryan and Kelly - listen intently from their positions around the table in the room. Larry is absent - he has some other business to attend to, and Chris is overseas, but the meeting moves forward as planned.

Charles, the group's Director of Operations, reviews the developments of the past week and launches into a discussion on systems requirements for the next project. The website needs to be updated, and it is essential that the team sticks to the schedule. Kelly makes a report on his assignment - there are credit card and e-commerce issues to be resolved, sales forecasts and business account agreements to be completed. Charles clears his throat and speaks again: "Okay, we have to keep on track in terms of schedules, but we also have to watch our cash flow... we don't want to tie up money unnecessarily." Andrew nods his head in agreement while Mark looks around the room pensively at the others present, but doesn't say anything...yet. He decides to hold his comments for later on in the meeting. In the back of the room, Ryan leans back in his chair and looks at his watch. Time is moving swiftly and there is much to be covered in this meeting.

Sounds like a typical business meeting in the corporate world - well... sorta... All the members of this particular meeting are in shorts and tees, with the exception of Ryan, who has opted for a more formal look for the meeting - he's in *jeans* and a tee shirt. It's been said time and time again that the landscape of business is constantly changing. The image of the conventional businessperson (y'know, the middle-aged guy in the dark suit, red power tie and carefully shined shoes) - has taken its fair share of revision over time, as an increasing number of young people compete in the world of business...on their own terms...


Enter the *BoomTribe*, a group of young entrepreneurs intent on doing things their own way. Known best for their skills as a DJ group, this seven-member team has developed and refined their own way of handling business, and in the process, has surpassed the expectations which the general public may have of a DJ unit.

Origins

Back in 1995, BoomTribe officially came into being. Original members Charles Walcott, Larry Evans, Andrew Payne, Mark Stapleton and Kelly Gittens had been friends since secondary school, but it was during the days at Barbados Community College (BCC) that the unit began organising small house parties and showcasing their talents as DJs. Realising that there was an opportunity to build a community of supporters, members of the 'Tribe began collecting email addresses of their patrons for future contact.

In a relatively short period of time, the BoomTribe DJs became known for their skills on the turntables, and the





unit began performing at a rapidly increasing number of events. The BoomTribe DJs were definite crowd pleasers at every event in which they performed, as fans responded to the 'Tribe's unique mix of Soca, Hip Hop, Rock, Latin and Reggae music incorporated into their performances.

In the summer of 2000, the original BoomTribe DJs had just won their second UWI DJ Mix-Down in a row, and if there was any doubt in the minds of the 'Tribe that the unit had the potential to be a permanent fixture on the entertainment scene in Barbados, it was at this point that those doubts were erased. Two new members, Ryan Davis and Christopher Brome were recruited. The team, now 7 members strong, soon formed a second organisation - Alt Entertainment, and focussed their energies on building a strong business unit. In the process, the 'Tribe began hosting its own events ... events with a difference.

According to Kelly, the intention of the BoomTribe events was to create an atmosphere where people had absolutely no choice but to have a whole lotta fun. "We were tired of people coming and posing off against a wall trying to look cool," he says. So the 'Tribe developed events where the emphasis was on participating in an overall theme. And from there, events such as *Carni Gras* (a hybrid of Caribbean carnival and New Orleans Mardi Gras), *Jungle Fever*, and *Dominion* (BoomTribe's version of a Halloween party) became staples on the entertainment arena. Other BoomTribe themed events included the ever-popular foam parties and toga parties.

The List

In a seemingly odd move, no one was allowed into any BoomTribe event unless you were on BoomTribe's mailing list. The move may have initially raised the eyebrows of many ... why restrict the number of people that can come to your event to the number of members you have, right? But the move was well planned and even better executed, as people flocked to BoomTribe website (www.boomtribe.com) to sign up.

Ryan Davis, BoomTribe's Director of Business Development admits, however, that originally, the events

were not intended to be members-only events. He ex-

plains that although the 'Tribe did require people to be on the mailing list to enter the parties, it was primarily to sustain their long-term email marketing strategy. The 'Tribe knew they would have to keep growing their mailing list aggressively in order to maintain the rapid growth of the events which the 'Tribe planned to hold from month to month. In addition, the team had long-term plans for Alt Entertainment, and they knew that the database of members would play a role in achieving those goals.

No matter the intention, however, BoomTribe events had a definite feel of exclusivity, and in the process, BoomTribe became somewhat of a phenomenon itself. It was almost like something out of the movie *Clueless*. If you weren't on *the list* you got this strange 'What are you, some kind of loser?' look from everyone else. After all, *the list* got you into the biggest entertainment events in the country. As the 'Tribe's popularity grew, BoomTribe events became arguably the most anticipated events across Barbados. Their popularity even led individual BoomTribe DJs to guest performances in the USA.

The Business of BoomTribe

But while the 'Tribe is most known for their energy on stage and their energy-filled performances, their savvy as a business unit is more than impressive. Their members-only admission strategy has created a model for Internet marketing in the Caribbean in a time where there was uncertainty that such a strategy can be effective. In fact, the BoomTribe mailing list currently boasts thousands of members in dozens of countries.

Ryan Davis, who is responsible for the business development of BoomTribe, acknowledges that as a business unit, BoomTribe has had to continuously evaluate its focus and take advantage of various opportunities as they become available. BoomTribe has recently formed alliances with various organisations in Barbados, and during the 2003 CropOver season, subscribers to the BoomTribe mailing list could request VIP guest list access to various events, including events held by BAJE International, Power x 4, Berger Boys, poverh.com, Refugees, Ignition and Yardfest at The Boatyard.

Alt Entertainment (now the umbrella organisation for BoomTribe) has also intensified its efforts to ensure its continued existence in the entertainment arena, and is currently





taking advantage of opportunities in the areas of music, events and 'non-traditional marketing services.' While BoomTribe has found its place in the limelight of the entertainment industry as a popular DJ group, Alt Entertainment has found its own niche in the business of entertainment by conducting the 'back-end' work of coordinating and planning events for other organisations. The team has also capitalised on the changing needs of the entertainment industry and demonstrated their business acumen when they purchased the island's first foam machine and used it for not only the 'Tribe's own events, but also at events hosted by other organisers. At present Alt Entertainment also offers services which include artiste management and talent booking.



The Future of BoomTribe

Further changes can be expected of the BoomTribe and of Alt Entertainment. In an exclusive interview with *Circuit*, the BoomTribe team revealed that a new chapter in the 'Tribe's online presence is currently in development. The existing site is currently being upgraded to provide users with a more dynamic experience in the online entertainment experience by developing a unified Caribbean youth culture. According to Davis, the new site will consist of three elements working together in tandem: original content, state-of-the-art interactive tools and e-commerce capabilities. The online platform will provide members with personalised email accounts, personalised start pages, message boards, chat rooms, games and contests, breaking entertainment and culture news, reviews and feature articles.

The expanded online presence will greatly enhance the 'Tribe's chances of achieving its long-term goal of becoming globally recognised as a youth brand and icon that is essentially Caribbean – a process which will take some time, but obviously, the BoomTribe team is well on its way...

A large photograph of a crowd of people at a concert or event. The crowd is dense and appears to be enjoying the event. The lighting is warm and red.


Defining a Unified Caribbean Youth Culture.
<http://boomtribe.com>

