

Isham Harris, Long Bio, July 2019

At 22, Isham Harris arrived in the US from Italy with a deep entrepreneurial spirit already ingrained in him. His father, a Navy sailor, and his mother, an Italian waitress who captured that sailor's heart, said goodbye to Isham as he headed to Texas for Air Force basic training.

While many might consider the military both a great training experience for a young man, and a full-time job defending our nation, Isham found time to purchase homes and flip them in his free time. His life in Italy had shown him there was no effective capitalism in which to grow a business and no path to purchasing a home at a young age. This opportunity was exactly why he had come to America to pursue the tangible American dream.

Isham and his wife saved money from their home flipping venture to invest in a beverage distribution company of their own, EnerVend. His drive quickly took him from servicing a few vending machines to full distribution in a wider area. Isham had discovered - and quickly built upon - his natural marketing skills. He realized he could develop his own effective marketing flyers with Photoshop to grow EnerVend. The energy drink business led him to Xyience and the UFC (Ultimate Fighting Championship) scene, where the opportunity to expand in a new direction presented itself.

Isham sold EnerVend and launched Fighter Warehouse, selling shirts, shorts, and other apparel for MMA (Mixed Martial Arts) events. He began to learn about SEO (Search Engine Optimization), quickly understanding its value. He discovered and that he could make mistakes and still do well with online marketing for his new business. By 2007, Fighter Warehouse was a multi-million dollar business with multiple stores in Florida, including the Tampa International Mall, and New York, and was the third largest online retailer. Their logo was even featured in three UFC video games.

But with this apparent success came hard lessons. The business had debts, and Isham needed to borrow \$200 just to get his air conditioning fixed at home. It was an "aha" moment. Something had to change, so in 2012 he sold Fighter Warehouse, leaving behind the stress and debt and taking with him the lessons and experience of the things he had done correctly. Isham acknowledges he's not a great businessman, but he is a great marketer. He knew how to get products and services in front of the right people and make the sale possible.

This knowledge prompted Isham to hire website developers to create his next business. Months later, and \$19,000 lighter in his bank account, he had no website to show for it. Fueled by this frustration, he locked himself in his small office and learned everything he needed to know about building a website in one month. He borrowed from the ideas of his first side business - buying and flipping houses - and segued them into another field where he could make money.

His enduring entrepreneurial spirit led him to his next passion project - buying and flipping websites. He honed his web building skills, selected the right websites with sufficient traffic and sales, then sold them when the time was right. One such business was PlusSizeDates.com. Isham improved their website, marketed it to grow their client base and decreased their costs. He believes he has the gift of timing with each of his business ventures, getting in and getting out at just the right time to achieve the best deals.

As one business opportunity led to another, Isham's family had been growing too. He realized that his drive to succeed in business meant that time was not being spent with his wife and children. Once again, something needed to change. And change it did.

Merchantside Marketing launched in 2015 with this offer – the first ten clients would receive free websites. In return, the websites would be used to establish the company’s portfolio and the clients would provide valuable testimonials. Isham began to add talented people to his team – a phenomenal coder, a graphics person, and writers. Every project had to be of the highest quality, a reflection of the drive and skill of the company. They were rewarded with multiple awards in just a couple of years time. When Isham plays, he plays to win, and when he competes, he competes to take home the top awards.

Through Merchantside Marketing, Isham has been able to unleash his creative side along with the competitive side. For him, winning for his clients is the perfect fit for his personality. He says he has no exit strategy for this business because it is something he loves and enjoys so much. His team allows him time to step away and enjoy his family and faith once again. In addition to building a strong business with the right people, finding the right clients is also key. Prospective clients will find him to be incredibly honest and forthcoming, and he looks for the same qualities in them.