

# Digital Whiz Kids

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A RAPPER, MUSICIAN, RUNNING COACH, collage artist and dancer are all among the staffers of Sarasota-based digital ad agency atLarge Inc., led by a former competitive mountain biker. Words that come to mind to describe this group of young professionals (age range 23-32) may include eclectic, creative and talented. The founder of atLarge has a different label.

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"We're a bunch of misfits," says Anand Pallegar.

All misfits should be so competent. Pallegar, 30, was tapped as the "young professional of the year" by the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce. And his five-year-old company consistently racks up raves for intelligent web design and cross platform marketing.

Pallegar might be the founder, who works with programmers, project managers and designers, but none of the 15 employees have titles. That's to avoid the "silo effect" says Amanda Eyer, who reluctantly gave the job description of "digital strategist," when pressed.

The company's happy customers include IMG Academies, a multi-sport training facility in Bradenton that includes the famed Bollettieri Tennis Academy. IMG credits atLarge for its 400-percent increase in 2009 online sales from the year prior. "They've been the perfect local partner," says Chris Ciaccio, director of sales and marketing.

In June, atLarge won a Stevie Award for its IMG work in the Best Software Programming and Design Category at the 2009 American Business Awards, besting more than 2,600 entries in more than 40 categories.

The company also brought global recognition to the start-up Film & Entertainment Office in Sarasota



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## They call themselves “misfits,” but Anand Pallegar’s atLarge Inc. continues to rack up awards and clients

County. In 2007, atLarge incorporated the popular “shopping cart” feature used on retail sites to the film office’s web site. What visitors browsed and selected from was a production directory of people, services and goods in the county. Users were then able to send mass emails to everyone in their “cart” about their project, and ask for quotes and availability of dates.

“We were the only ones doing that in 2007,” says agency director Jeanne Corcoran. “We won an award: fourth place from the Association of Film Commissions International. Here we are, little Sarasota County, 570 square miles, brand new, and we managed to take fourth place. It was because of that incredible web site.”

Employees of atLarge ([www.atlargeinc.com](http://www.atlargeinc.com)) are fueled by the company’s mantra “nothing else matters but the work” and Pallegar’s requirement that every project meet the “Four F’s” – fun, forward, fame and financial.

The “we’re all in this together” culture extends beyond the walls of the 1920s house that serves as the company’s headquarters in downtown Sarasota. The location (what used to be the area’s first golf course) lends itself to atLarge’s green initiative to reduce its

footprint with recycling, composting, using dry erase boards and digital presentations on a projector (not printed handouts on paper), video conferencing (to cut down on travel) and electronics that are Energy Star compliant.

Twenty percent of the company’s revenues (in-service or outright donation) goes toward Dream Large – the sponsorship of a non-profit where atLarge can lend its expertise. Last year’s recipient was Girls Incorporated of Sarasota County. atLarge created what Girls Inc. executive director Stephanie Feltz calls a “robust” web site that increased traffic, donations, and community and program participants’ interactivity.

“For summer pro-

grams, we only have 38 percent of our families requiring some level of financial assistance. Before, we were as high as 65 percent requiring financial assistance. So we’re not turning away needy families, but because of the quality of the web site, we’re able to attract paying families,” Feltz says.

Basketball star Shaquille O’Neal found out about Girls Inc. by way of the web site, and donated free tickets and a chance to hang out with him at a game.

atLarge also created the first technology conference on the west coast of Florida three years ago with the Sarasota Manatee Technology Conference. After raising funds and organizing a day of programs to show how technology can be leveraged for business, atLarge donated the \$10,000 raised through tickets sales to the Sarasota Chamber of Commerce, Manatee Chamber of Commerce and 82 Degrees Tech (a bi-county initiative).

Pallegar started his company in the ground floor of a Lakewood Ranch condo with \$300 and a leased computer in 2004. atLarge got its name, playing off the notion of someone or something missing, and his company filling that need. Within two years, Pallegar tripled the size of the company, amassing 21 clients and two employees. Now, he estimates his 15 employees serve 20 to 25 clients. The majority of the clients are in the bay area, and a few are outside of Florida and even overseas. The company is self-financed, Pallegar says, with no outside investors or long term debt. He declined to disclose its revenues or earnings.

The pet-friendly company allows employees to bring their dogs to work. Up to six dogs are allowed to roam the multi-room house/headquarters at one time. “It’s chaos,” says Eyer. “We have a discovery meeting once a week – you get 15 minutes to bring your issues up and that’s one of the issues to come up. If that’s your burning issue – who should take turns bringing their dogs to work – then things are going very well.”

That’s not to say this group of “misfits” doesn’t engage in “civil discourse,” as Pallegar calls it. He acknowledges passionate debate and strong feelings from his employees. And he welcomes it. “We take so much pride in our work with what we do, there’s no complacency here. So we’re going to have push points. But part of that is what makes the end results better,” he says.

Earlier this year atLarge opened an office in Tampa’s Harbour Island and one near Ann Arbor and the University of Michigan, where Pallegar founded a web hosting company in his dorm room. “Cities often re-emerge when they go through a decline,” Pallegar says. And he wants to lead the resurgence. Pallegar says atLarge will always be headquartered in Florida’s Gulf Coast, but he plans to have independent offices throughout the nation with project teams created based on skill sets rather than geographic locations.

“This is the year – the next two quarters – where we’ll be expanding our geographic footprint out of this market and into others. It will be interesting.” ■



### ANAND PALLEGAR

- Single, no kids
- British citizen with a “green card,” came to the States in 1996
- Enrolled in University of Michigan to study bio-chemistry and geography
- Dropped out of college in his second year when dorm room web hosting company took off
- Recruited as technical director to lead U.S. operations for Eye4U, at the time a European leader in interactive marketing
- Came to Sarasota in 2004, after a serious car accident requiring supervision brought him to where his parents reside
- Average work week: 60 to 70 hours, spent between management, sales and volunteer work