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Online gamer turns interest into successful venture



OK INNOVATIONS

Yukon native Jonathan Yarbor was a prolific gamer as a teenager, practically living on computers and game systems like millions of young people worldwide.

Then his dad had a "suggestion."

"My dad said 'You need to stop just playing games. You need to do something productive,'" Yarbor said. "I said 'Sure, why not? Let's do it.'"

So, spurred by his father, Bruce, Yarbor launched his first business.

"At the age of 16, I was actually building business websites," Yarbor said. "Eventually, that turned into a consulting business that I ran for the next four years."

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SEE THE VIDEO



To see a video on Jonathan Yarbor and his Nodecraft Hosting LLC, go to Oklahoman.com.



Nodecraft is part of a community of technology entrepreneurs located at StarSpace46 in Oklahoma City. (PHOTOS PROVIDED BY OCAST)

TOP: Jonathan Yarbor is co-founder and chief technology officer of Nodecraft, located in the StarSpace 46 technology co-working hub in Oklahoma City.

LEFT: Jonathan Yarbor, of Nodecraft, provides online gamers with a platform to keep their servers operational.

The Oklahoman

NODECRAFT

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Yarbor's love for online gaming began at an even earlier age.

"Literally, my first words were 'SEGA' from the old game system," Yarbor said. "My dad owned a retail computer store called Secondhand Software, and I was just engrossed in the gaming community as a whole at an early age."

Fast-forward a full decade after he launched his web-building business. Today, Yarbor is co-founder and chief technology officer for a local Oklahoma company called Nodecraft Hosting LLC, which provides server space for a worldwide gaming community of millions.

Finding a niche

Yarbor and a U.K.-based business partner named James Ross found each other on the internet from a shared interest in online gaming. The pair connected as fellow Minecraft players who became

dissatisfied with the market offering server space to gamers.

Minecraft has taken the world by storm as a highly creative game in which players use LEGO-like blocks to build entire cities, spaceships or anything they can imagine. The game was recently acquired by Microsoft, which has expanded its availability to mobile phones, gaming consoles and PC gaming worldwide. Players as close as the same neighborhood or as far as countries apart can play, build and compete with each other as long as one of the players have their own game server.

That's the niche that Yarbor and Ross stepped in to fill in 2012 when they founded Nodecraft.

"We were just a couple of online gamers who just met online and had this issue," Yarbor said. "We couldn't find a server host who was worth their salt and worth paying for. We said we'll just make our own. It didn't phase us that we were on two continents and a whole pond apart, as people say."

In fact, the partners had



Tommy Yi, StarSpace46 co-founder, works at his desk in the Oklahoma City entrepreneurial and technology co-working hub. [PHOTO PROVIDED]

been in business together for more than a year before they met in person when Ross came to the States for a visit.

For a monthly subscription price that begins at \$10, Nodecraft offers subscribers server space and handles all the responsibilities of keeping it running at all times. Nodecraft provides the worldwide gaming community with space from leased servers in three locations across the United States, Amsterdam and Singapore.

StarSpace46 startups

Yarbor and Ross have bootstrapped Nodecraft's growth into a five-person operation. The company is based in Oklahoma City's StarSpace46 entrepreneurial and co-working hub.

The location represents the full circle that Yarbor has traveled in his career. He was a tenant at the original Oklahoma City Coworking Collaborative a decade ago and was the first tenant in StarSpace46

when it opened.

"What we've found is that StarSpace gives us a network of support and the opportunity to chat with some other co-workers who might be working on a similar problem," Yarbor said. "I'm really passionate about the startup scene here in Oklahoma City."

StarSpace46 co-founder Tommy Yi said the co-working hub has more than 20 entrepreneurs and small businesses working out of its space. Some are established businesses like

Nodecraft, while others are just starting out.

"I think the thing that co-working spaces really bring is the community aspect," Yi said. "What we bring here are like-minded individuals who are sort of on similar paths on their journey."

For Yarbor, that journey means expanding Nodecraft's scope of markets it serves. The company will soon offer game server hosting for 15 additional games. From there, they plan to raise funds to build a market for game developers, which is designed to improve profitability for everyone involved.

"This is not a fad; it is not going away," he said. "In fact, it's becoming the new sports for this generation. It's going to be an alternative source for folks to get together, to bond over like my business partner and I in two different countries. That's the real future we see in this whole market."

Tell that to dad.

Jim Stafford writes about Oklahoma innovation and research and development topics on behalf of the Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science & Technology ([OCAST](#)).