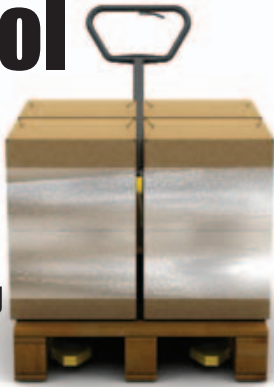


# New School SSI

An Innovative Warehousing System

BY JOYCE ARMOR



It takes an entrepreneur to know one, and Horry County natives Asher Blocker and Daniel Lowrey could be the poster boys for the species: They saw a need and found a way to fill it, creating a new niche in the warehousing business.

Blocker, from Conway—his father is a pharmacist and his mother a teacher—graduated from Coastal Carolina University in 2005 with a degree



in communications. Lowrey spent his formative years in Pawleys Island. His father is an architect, and his mother owns Black Swan Interiors, in Murrells Inlet. The younger Lowrey graduated from Clemson University in 2005 with degrees in economics and English.

After graduation, Lowrey worked as a stockbroker in Greenville, S.C., for about six months and transferred to L.A. for another six months before being lured back home to help out in his mother's business. Blocker was working in sales at WPDE TV-15, where Lowrey's sister, Lauren, is a

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news anchor, when their paths crossed and they became friends.

Blocker had been at WPDE about a year and half when Lowrey called and asked if he wanted to work at Black Swan Interiors, in the warehouse. The timing was right, as Blocker had been chafing at the corporate environment. "I realized I'm kind of a 'my way' kind of guy," he says.

Working in the warehousing environment for several months, the friends saw problems and, more importantly, a niche.

"If an interior designer is doing an entire house, he or she might be ordering 100 different things from 15 different vendors," says Lowrey. "There are different time frames on the deliveries."

Some designers store the items on site, paying the overhead for a large building that's sometimes full, sometimes sparse. Others use self-storage units, paying employees to drive back and forth to retrieve items or check on inventory, paying a storage fee between jobs when the unit might be empty.

The two brainstormed about how to improve the system. Daniel, a "self-professed computer nerd from the age of six," programmed software that enabled them to take local warehousing to the next level and, in October 2007, New School SSI (Stock, Storage, Installation) was born.

When a box comes into the 10,000-square-foot New School SSI warehouse, which is centrally located near Hard Rock Park in Myrtle Beach, its length, width and height is measured and entered on the computer, which calculates the cubic measurement and cost for storage.

Clients, notified by email what has been delivered, can create their own labels—"Mrs. Smith's sofa" or "Jones Street cabinets"—and otherwise organize a shipment online. New School SSI will deliver items or hold them for pick-up.

"You're only paying for the exact time and space you're using," notes

Blocker, "and you can go online and completely customize your shipments. We're basically bringing the big business concept to small businesses."


It was a challenge at first, two young guys telling someone they had a better way for him to conduct his business. And it's difficult for some business owners not to know a finite amount they will pay each month for a particular service. The amount fluctuates because they're only paying for the services they use. The company also handles all the logistics of returns. Zach Edson works for New School off and on, and others are on call for deliveries.

New School SSI—not to be confused with the "old school" way of doing things—has grown considerably since the doors opened about a year ago. "In the economic downturn, you'd think it would be hard to start a business, particularly one that relates to real estate and construction," says Lowrey, "but we're thriving. A downturn forces people to look

at new ways to do things. How can they get more efficient?"

The system was created to improve warehousing for interior designers, but the partners quickly realized it could be adapted to any business that has items coming in and out. The client list includes designers, window treatment, cabinet and heating and cooling companies, an eBay store, the Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce, which is storing more than a million Visitor Guides at the warehouse, and the Myrtle Beach Convention Center, where New School SSI has solved the problem of shipments arriving at inconvenient times for trade show participants.

Like any good entrepreneurs, Asher and Lowrey aren't resting on their laurels. They're planning to franchise the warehousing system nationally. "It only takes one person to run, plus a couple of delivery guys," says Lowrey.

"It's warehousing by smart people for smart people," adds Blocker. 

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