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Real estate duo and longtime friends excel by being nimble

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Chris Skyles remembers an appointment a couple years ago when he was showing an industrial building to a prospective tenant. He'd recently returned to Austin and taken a job as a landlord representative broker with a major real estate company. But when the tenant's broker showed up in flip-flops, Skyles was taken aback.

In a phone conversation later that night, he told his longtime friend Justin Bayne: "There's a huge void in the market for quality tenant rep services and the competition isn't that strong. I think if we kick things off together we could get some real traction."



It didn't take much to convince Bayne, who'd been working in real estate in Washington, D.C., to return to Austin. In June 2006, the duo launched their boutique brokerage firm SkylesBayne Co. with no office and no capital. Less than two years later, the company has completed roughly 350,000 square feet in industrial and office leases and buys, with a total value of about \$22 million.

"We've always shared an entrepreneurial spirit," Bayne says of himself and Skyles, who attended Westlake High School and Texas A&M University together.

After Texas A&M, Bayne worked for a while with Morgan Stanley and Skyles was with Dell Inc. before they both ended up joining a commercial real estate firm in Houston. There they learned the ins and outs of the business -- and about the competitive nature of it. A few years later they each went their separate ways, only to regroup again in Austin.

Launching a tenant rep business with no client companies was daunting at best, says Bayne. The two began by targeting industrial users.

"We knew about the effectiveness of cold-calling from our experience in Houston," says Bayne. "We would get up early, get ourselves fired up, then drive around all day long, knocking on doors and making as many business contacts as possible. It's very difficult to

walk into someone's business; you get the door shut in your face. But we realized if we were going to do this, we needed to set ourselves apart from the next guy, in terms of service."

Skyles says there was plenty of rejection at first, but having his best friend as his business partner and at his side came in handy.

"He would take one building, I would take another, and then we would meet up afterward and swap horror stories," he says with a laugh.

Over the next few months, Skyles and Bayne scoured Austin in search of potential clients and, to their surprise, landed a number of large deals rather quickly. The brokers in their mid-20s convinced high-powered decision makers through a one-sentence statement: "Give us a chance to earn your business."

With a base of industrial deals to build off of, the duo spread out into office tenant representation, opened a physical office and launched a Web site. In recent months they've completed deals for groups like The Ampersand Agency, Reddwerks Corp. and Sign Tech International.

"We've worked for big firms, and we know we can provide service greater than or equal to any national firm in the U.S., but we're also nimble enough to react to clients' needs quickly," says Bayne.

That nimbleness came in handy for Mark Winger. When the CEO of Austin-based **Medwing.com** found himself in urgent need of a new corporate office and warehouse space for his Internet retail company, he put a call out to brokers citywide.

"I had called just about everyone in town and told them, 'This is what I'm looking for. I need to make the deal fast and whoever can do it for me, that's who I'm going with,'" says Winger. It was Skyles who came through with multiple options for both spaces and was able to lock down deals for Winger on a 4,000-square-foot downtown office and 12,000-square-foot warehouse.

"We got the deal done in two days," says Winger. "There's no one else I would use except Chris."

While focused primarily on tenant rep brokerage, SkylesBayne represents the owners of several historic properties as well, like two at the intersection of Sixth and Red River streets. The two also represent local real estate investor Steve Wimberley in his deals.

"We're really proud of what we've done so far," says Bayne.

Skyles and Bayne think they'll likely bring on another two to three brokers in the next year as the firm's client list grows.

amistretta@bizjournals.com | (512) 494-2519