

Date: Feb 19, 2010; Section: Business; Page: 1C

JUST THE RIGHT NOTE

How does a kid from Miami Gardens become the CEO of a successful hip-hop label? Ask Ted Lucas of Slip N Slide Records.

BY DIANA MOSKOVITZ

dmoskovitz@MiamiHerald.com

A hit record will change your life.

That's the hip-hop gospel of Ted Lucas, the Miami-Gardens-boy-turned-musicentrepreneur, leader of the independent label that helped put Miami rappers on the map.

The evidence of Slip N Slide Records' success is scattered across its South Beach offices. A framed magazine cover here, a platinum record there. There are so many platinum awards that Lucas crams the extras into the space between a couch and wall.

But what he really wants you to know is that a hit record can change your life.

The saying hangs from several walls scattered across the building, along with other pieces of advice, like "a hook makes a hit record."

"We're not sleeping at all," he says on a short break one Friday afternoon, after rattling off a list of releases he has scheduled for this year.

"We've got to make great music and work harder."

Lucas has told the story of his success before. Sitting inside his recording studio, he tells the narrative with ease.

He grew up near what is now Sun Life Stadium and dreamed of playing professional football.

Lucas played high school football at American High, then with a scholarship went to Chaminade Preparatory High in Hollywood.

He figured the next step was college ball and spent one semester at Ranger College, a junior college in Texas.

Except money was tight, he says, and Lucas discovered that higherlevel football was a lot harder than it looked.

Lucas came home for winter break in 1991 and never went back.

He made his way into the world of promoting club events through his friend Derek "Hollywood" Harris. He had some success and felt ready to move up to arena shows.

Those didn't go so well.

He still remembers the show that forced him out at the Miami Arena.

Rain fell all night, and almost nobody bought tickets. Lucas had to pay the acts, including R. Kelly and Levert, even though they never performed.

"That's the kind where you go home," he says, "and you can't sleep at night."

ARTISTS GOT PAID

His money gone, Lucas decided to move to the other side of entertainment, working with the artists. Because, it seemed to him, they always got paid.

In 1994, his motivation grew after Hollywood was fatally shot while sitting in his car.

"It showed me that street life didn't pay. The end of the street life is prison or death," Lucas said.

He got his first taste of music success about three years later, featuring the street-savvy raps of Hollywood's half-brother, Maurice Young, also known as Trick Daddy.

When Hollywood died, Trick was in jail on cocaine charges. When he got out, Lucas and Trick made a deal.

"If he stays out of trouble, I'm going to invest in him," Lucas said. "Thank God he stayed out of trouble."

The first album, *Based on a True Story*, was recorded in a friend's house. They lined a bedroom and bathroom with Wal-Mart purchased foam, put the recording equipment in the bedroom and ran a cord into the bathroom.

Trick recorded the album in the shower.

Based on a True Story sold 500,000 copies. Then came Trick's second album, www.thug.com.

The way Lucas tells the story, Slip N Slide hit the clubs hard during the 1999 Super Bowl weekend in Miami, tapping DJs on the shoulder and getting them to play the first single, a biting rap back and forth battle between Trick and Hollywood's former girlfriend, Katrina Taylor. She went on to become the rapper Trina.

Lucas figured the song would sell itself.

The Monday after the game, the major labels were in his lobby. Within 24 hours, he had a distribution deal with Atlantic, which still distributes the label. Since then, Slip N Slide has added distribution deals with Def Jam and EMI.

GOLD, PLATINUM

As for the rest of the story, it's more easily summarized in all the gold and platinum records hanging from Slip N Slide's walls.

Among those stars remains Trina, who spent Super Bowl weekend in South Florida shooting the video for her latest single, featuring Diddy and Keri Hilson. *Million Dollar Girl* is filled with slick sounds and catchy groove — along with a shout out to Miami less than a minute in.

It hasn't all been easy. Trick broke off and started his own label, Dunk Ryders. Slip N Slide diversified, signing the R&B group Jagged Edge last year and growing the rap roster to include Plies and Rick Ross.

But pieces of the original start remain. They include Trina, who is scheduled to release her next album in May. She spent this past Super Bowl weekend filming the video for its first single, *Million Dollar Girl*, which also features Diddy and Keri Hilson.

The music industry evolved from cassettes to CD's to the iTunes store. Lucas' market research includes feedback from his children about what plays on their friends' iPods.

But one thing stays constant. Lucas is pure Miami.

That's why Lucas says he's turned down offers to move.

That's why, among his many accomplishments, he boasts about his Tom Dowd Lifetime Achievement Award from the Entertainment, Arts and Sports Law division of the Florida Bar. The winners before him include Dolphins coaching legend Don Shula, which Lucas is quick to point out.

And like any Miami native steeped in Dolphins lore, he can't help but talk about his business — and the importance of a hit record — in pigskin terms.

"It's like a football team," he says of his business. "You got a hit record, but now you have to go back to win the championship."



BARBARA P. FERNANDEZ/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

HIS FIRM'S A HIT: Ted Lucas' Slip N Slide Records has produced so many platinums that he hardly has room in his office for all the awards.