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InfiNet poised to double sales on heels of acquisitions of two local companies

by Michelle Leach

InfiNet Solutions is twice as big as it was five years ago and it's set to double again by 2011, most notably through its acquisition of computer retailer Computer Outlet Center and enterprise phone systems provider Cal-Tech & Associates. Partnerships have put the comprehensive IT solutions firm in a position where its 7,000-square-foot office space in Ralston no longer accommodates its burgeoning staff, and few partnerships are more gratifying — and beneficial to InfiNet's clients — than the one it has forged with software giant Microsoft.

"We are Microsoft gold partners, which doesn't mean much to most people but that's the strongest partnership level you can have with Microsoft," said Co-Founder Steve Johnson.

In InfiNet's five-state region roughly 8,500 companies are certified Microsoft partners, Johnson said.

"Only 250 are gold partners," he said.

Why so few gold partners? It's a tough status to achieve, according to Partner Michael Johnson (no relation).

"You have to meet a certain amount of requirements: You have to achieve certain customer satisfaction levels, a certain amount of certification and references," he said.

According to the Microsoft Web site, gold certification requirements include that applicants employ or contract at least two exclusive Microsoft Certified Professionals, or develop at least one product that passes Microsoft's strict hardware and software tests.

Steve Johnson said it took more than a year for InfiNet to achieve gold status in 2006.

Though clients may not readily recognize the value of partnering with a gold certified firm, they are receiving benefits from this distinction nonetheless.

"The Microsoft partnership gives us things like if we have a high-end Microsoft problem we have better avenues of getting hold of someone at Microsoft," Steve Johnson said.

He said those in positions of leadership with the company know him by name, or are willing to meet with the firm's team. For example, one Microsoft professional flew in to

spend a few days at InfiNet's quarters at 6430 S. 84th St. Conversely, an InfiNet employee flew out to Seattle to talk software development with Microsoft team members.

Just as doors are wide open for communication with Microsoft, so is communication critical with regard to InfiNet's client relationships.

"We establish relationships with the company where they call us when they have questions; they don't just call when the machine is down," Steve Johnson said.

With the acquisition of two long-time Omaha companies, Computer Outlet Center and Cal-Tech & Associates, InfiNet has more offerings to provide to those established clients. And Computer Outlet Center itself was the result of an established relationship.

"InfiNet bought computers from them," said Partner Marshall Evans, who also heads up the firm's 7-year-old programming division, InfiNet Development.

InfiNet had also developed Computer Outlet Center's Web site. But the relationship goes back much further than that.

As a teen, Steve Johnson worked for another computer hardware company. One of the company's employees left to start

Computer Outlet Center, and Johnson was one of the first employees hired. He later went on to open Computer Outlet Center's La Vista location, and after Johnson left the company in the late 1990s he continued to stay in touch with the proceeding owners. In addition, both Michael Johnson and co-founder Tim Heinzen had worked for Computer Outlet Center, with Heinzen having a stake in the company's ownership at one time.

InfiNet's roots with Cal-Tech & Associates don't run as deep, but the acquisition was part of a grand design.

"For many years our clients wanted us to do their phones but we couldn't do that because we just focused on IT; since then, the phone systems have become more like computers so the learning curve for us was a lot smaller," Steve Johnson said. "But we wanted to know how to run the traditional legacy phone systems, so we put our feelers out there to see what company was for sale." These acquisitions are putting InfiNet in a position to become what Michael Johnson



Partners Marshall Evans, Mike Johnson, Tim Heinzen and Co-Founder Steve Johnson ... IT solutions firm one of 250 in 5-state area recognized by software giant for customer service, professional expertise.

calls the "premiere one-stop shop for IT in Omaha"; if a customer is already engaged in networking through InfiNet Solutions, InfiNet's people know the client and can easily develop a Web site that conveys said client's culture. InfiNet can just as easily be trusted to find the right phone or hardware solution for said client without the client shopping around for separate companies for phone, hardware and software, networking and Web development.

Steve Johnson indicated this diversity represents the biggest recent industrywide shift. It allows companies a chance to shine as well as fail.

He recalled when a client had suffered with a mail server that was down for three weeks. That client, Steve Johnson said, had been told their data — which included critical information for the CEO on appointments and presentations — was lost and gone forever.

"They came to us from a referral and within five hours we had their stuff back to them," Johnson said.

Through the acquisition of Computer Outlet Center, InfiNet will optimize its relationships with even the smallest of companies — such as the home-based business with one workstation.

The company will be drawing its clients in even more through organized training and learning sessions, such as that hosted in preparation for the recent launch of the much-anticipated Windows 7. Steve John-

son said the firm had been growing so fast since 2004 that its focus wasn't so much on activities like lunch and learns but with the addition of Director of Sales and Marketing, Barry Kriha, in August, more emphasis will be placed on this type of outreach.

Steve Johnson's passion to serve customers by owning a business may only be outdone by his passion for technology, which was first honed in grade school.

Johnson married these passions to start InfiNet Solutions in 1998 at the age of 21.

Evans joined the firm four years later doing networking, but with the growth of the business, he was able to focus on his interest in Web building by heading up InfiNet Development in 2007.

Michael Johnson joined InfiNet in 2003 as a technician and quickly rose through the ranks.

In all, what started as a Steve Johnson-Heinzen venture has grown to a team of 26 employees in eight years, with plans to hire additional employees for Computer Outlet Center and InfiNet Solutions.

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