

B2B Works

A surveying equipment distributor finds that forging newfangled relationships with other businesses has helped it not only survive the weak economy but grow dramatically.

On January 1 of this year, First Point entered into an agreement with Magellan Navigation to become one of their NCSA (North, Central, and South America) distributors. First Point covers the northeast region from Virginia to Maine and out to Missouri, serving as both a retailer and wholesaler. This is a unique relationship, for sure, as we have dealers who are also competitors in our same geographic area. But it works—we call it “coopetition.” It has afforded us many opportunities we may not have had otherwise, and it has given a sense of unity in the Northeast with many dealers.

This is just one component of a strategy that has worked for us in recent times. First Point has been growing exponentially even through the tough economy. We attribute that to the business-to-business relationships we have built as well as the products Magellan Professional has released over the last two years.

We have seen dealers competitively cooperate with each other in the region. We work together with many of the dealers on joint business ventures. We have served as the liaison for some of these companies to work together on projects where they may have directly competed in the past. We have become a central repository of information and project and product knowledge. As we learn about projects, products, or possibilities in the Northeast, we assess the situation and try to get the right people involved to support the client as we would if it were in our own backyard.

Besides Magellan, I can cite several examples of the business-to-business relationships we've established. Superior Instrument Company, a surveying equipment distributor and repair company with three locations in Connecticut, handles all equipment repair aspects of our business. They are certified in many of the leading manufacturers' products.

We work with Wind Environmental Services, a GIS firm in Bonne Terre, Missouri, on many creative customization projects. These involve implementing GIS with customers and their supporting them on it post sale. As one example, we are working with associations such as the New Jersey Ground Water Association (NJGWA). Carrying that a step further, we work with B.L. Robinson Engineering & Surveying Company, an engineering, surveying, and GIS company in Akron, Ohio, and 39 Degrees North, a GIS software company in Bloomington, Indiana, on mobile integration in the GIS World.

Our work on the NJGWA project epitomizes how we have used relationships to grow our business. The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection passed legislation requiring GPS coordinates to be associated to any permits sub-



mitted by a licensed well driller in the state for location purpose. The NJGWA called on us to sell, service, and support them in this new venture. We have implemented multiple trainings for members of the association as well as back-end support. We continue to work with the members today on refining their skills using the Magellan Mobile Mapper CX. First Point customized ESRI's ArcPad software to be industry specific to the well-drilling industry. We have also automated processes so they run in the background with the intent of having a company hire a new employee, read our step-by-step manual, and successfully capture data the same day.

First Point is a division of York, PA-based Print-O-Stat, Inc. The parent company has 13 locations in 4 states, and we have grown to approximately 180 employees. We are a privately held company started in 1954 with a focus on the AEC market. The core of the Print-O-Stat business for years had been selling large-format plotting and copying equipment to architects, engineers, and construction companies and also reproducing blueprints.

Print-O-Stat handles manufacturers such as Xerox, Océ, HP, and Cannon and has several divisions, including Signs and Graphics, Digital Archiving, Commercial Printing, and Survey. In 2005, Print-O-Stat introduced the First Point Division to differentiate from its normal product line and give separation for the two sides of the business. It also gave the Survey Division a rebirth.

In 2007, Print-O-Stat appointed one of its AEC sales representatives—yours truly—to the position of First Point division manager. I previously held a position as a precision optical layout specialist for the commercial printing industry. I was

Continued on page 26

WEATHERING THE STORM

Continued on from 24

responsible for the layout portion of the projects to hold extremely precise “machine” tolerances. This gave me a clear understanding of the need for accuracy and precision in surveying.

Today, with First Point on the rise, the balance is starting to shift. Print-O-Stat is growing rapidly and entering into new ventures with opportunities every day and has a head start on the First Point Division, but management feels we can catch them soon. It has become a friendly competition for First Point, with aggressive goals and implementation.

The Magellan relationship has brought an awareness to our company from other manufacturers and dealers across the entire United States. We have manufactures and dealers calling us for advice and support on products and in new business ventures. In Magellan Professional Products alone, we have increased our sales by over 6,000 percent! That is no typo. We strongly believe that the relationship with a client begins after the sale. I believe this is one reason our business has grown as it has in the last 18 months.

As another result of our relationship with Magellan and continued growth, Magellan has given us access to their OEM



boards and sensor lines as well. This has also opened some big doors. The federal and military markets are the majority users of these products. We are doing business with many large government contractors and are always looking for more. We are working on projects using the Magellan OEM GPS boards in tanks, for unmanned drone vehicles, weather observation crafts, aircraft, and at sea. Applications abound for these products and services we now offer to those sectors.

First Point will continue to develop business-to-business relationships and build the support and sales team. This development will help us strengthen the ties to our clients and dealers. We are committed to getting the industry back to the customer service mode it was in was many years ago. We are excited about the new opportunities that have presented themselves, and we look forward to opening more locations over the years to come. ♣

CHAD BOYD is division manager at First Point in York, PA.

THE NEXT GENERATION

Continued from page 25

lay-offs I think I would have been continually fearful of what were to come next if the economy does not turn around soon. Now at least I know what my fate is and what I need to do.

First thing when I got home, I tracked down my resume on my laptop that got me through five years of college and I dusted it off. My former manager called me that same afternoon and asked that I send him a copy because he had a couple of people who would be interested in looking at it. I greatly appreciated his efforts in my newly begun job search.

Before accepting a permanent position in the Nashville office, I had worked as an intern in two of the company's other offices. I was very impressed with the knowledge and drive of the surveyors I had worked with there. All of those people had been great mentors and were eager to pass on their knowledge. I really admired this and hoped to continue to work with these kinds of people, so it was an easy decision for me to accept

a permanent position with them. Upon graduating and beginning my journey as an LSIT, never in a million years did I think that I could get laid off so soon in a career. I guess I was wrong though.

So now I have begun the daunting task of searching for new employment. The anxiety of approaching potential employers has returned, but I do enjoy meeting new people in this industry. I have always tried to tell myself that all I can do is be who I am and show that I am an extremely motivated hard worker with high goals.

I am aware that many surveying companies are struggling right now and that the job search may not be an easy one, but all I can do is keep on trying. I hope that I will be able to somehow land on my feet, despite this current setback. So far I have been working on getting my resume out to as many companies as possible in the area, and hopefully someone will have an opening where I can continue to build upon the skills

that I have obtained through my education and the past 15 months working as a project surveyor.

I will try to end this column on a high note by offering a small piece of advice to those who may be looking for a surveying job like I am. All I can offer is to keep your head up and have confidence in yourself. These situations are very difficult for so many people, and I feel like I keep asking myself, “What could I have done better?” The more I think on it, the more I feel there is nothing that I could have done any better. I always try to give 100% in everything I do, and sometimes tough decisions have to be made that you have no control over. ♣

ASHLEY ROSE-NALIN is a graduate in land surveying and geomatics engineering as well as civil engineering from Purdue University and lives near Nashville, TN.

