

# Allen Looked For Profitable Ideas... And Found Our Business Improvement Group.

Allen Aukes is the founder and CEO of Midwest IT Systems, a computer consulting firm based in Blue Earth, Minnesota. Since its founding in 2002, the company has grown from one employee to its current staff of six. Growing a startup business has required many "course corrections" along the way. Having previously worked for the CIA's Office of Security, Allen typically receives a warm reception from bank executives. As a result of this highly specialized knowledge, Midwest IT Systems has developed a strong vertical market among banks, where security is always a foremost concern.

Banks now account for nearly a third of Midwest IT's revenues. But this success was not a gift. Specialized market niches require not only specialized knowledge, but also market-specific offerings. In designing an offering to attract banks, Allen tapped into the knowledge and experiences of his fellow Profit Makers Business Improvement Group (BIG) members. Each BIG consists of owners and executives of IT solutions providers.

BIG members' companies have similar characteristics such as number of employees, annual revenues and number of locations. Members are selected so that competitors never participate in the same BIG. This promotes trust and sharing of ideas. The participants also execute non-disclosure agreements in recognition of the confidentiality of the shared information.

At Allen's first Business Improvement Group Conference the participants shared their managed service plans, pricing and agreements. After studying the various plans, one plan in particular embodied many of the features that Allen wanted to offer. After discussions with the plan's creator, Allen combined many parts of that plan with his own ideas into Midwest IT's offering. Two years after the plan's introduction, a dozen clients have been added to Midwest IT's growing business. In Faribault County, with its population of 21,000, that's a sizable accomplishment!

So, what does Allen think about his Profit Makers Business Improvement Group? When asked, he said, "I have no business background. I am always looking for ideas on personnel issues, sales and marketing, as well as maintaining profitability. If you are going to walk through a mine field, follow someone."

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