

Autotask and Business Improvement Group Aid in Secant's Success



Garret Peaslee
President, Secant Technologies



Headquartered in Kalamazoo, Secant Technologies has over 20 years of experience providing end-to-end network solutions in Southwest Michigan. At first focusing on desktop publishing, print shops and typesetters, Secant grew from 5 employees to over 40 employees in its first 5 years. Then in one six month period, net operating margins nosedived from 45% to 15%. That began a 5-year period of decline that saw Secant reduced to 14 employees. The market had dramatically changed! President Garret Peaslee and his partners Chuck Warner, Alex Ellingsen and Parr Crone, knew that serious changes were needed to their business model. They unbundled services from their offerings and charged for them separately. They reduced their reliance upon product sales and introduced new service offerings including network consulting, design, installation and management, cabling and wireless.

To update their own skills the partners decided to participate in the Taylor Business Group's (TBG) Managing for Profitability Workshop. Designed specifically for the VAR community, this 2-day workshop shows executives how to drive more profits to their companies' bottom lines using TBG's Roadmap to Profitability. Over the course of the workshop the participants worked closely together, got to know each other and became friends. Upon conclusion of the workshop, they decided to maintain an ongoing working relationship as well as their newly formed friendships. Thus they became a Profit Makers Business Improvement Group (BIG) facilitated by the Taylor Business Group.

The group meets twice annually. Each conference begins with a financial performance review and then progresses to special topics chosen in advance by the members. Finally, two of the members present their companies to the group, which acts as the board of directors, asking questions and offering suggestions.

About 5 years ago Secant began offering proactive services, including a portfolio of managed services. Garret used the BIG as a sounding board to test and refine his ideas. He continues to do that

as he explores additional offering such as managed print services. Another suggestion that Garret received was to investigate Autotask, the hosted professional service administration software for VARs. Consequently, Secant implemented Autotask to improve contract management, technician utilization and business management. Since then they have taken advantage of many of its other capabilities including the sales management module and client access portal as well as outside integration with Xerox's PagePack program and Zenith Infotech's Endpoint monitoring service. Autotask has brought a level of accuracy and completeness to the business that was unattainable with the previous system.

So how is Secant doing these days? In the first half of 2009 profit margins increase to over 10% and there are now 65 employees. Asked for his opinion of the BIG, Garret responded, "My participation in the BIG has benefited my company on many fronts. Having a financial model that provides us with the road map to a strong bottom line is essential. We now understand how to evaluate the numbers and make informed decisions. Also, having a group of owners that I can exchange ideas with and receive candid feedback is invaluable. The two day meetings I attend give me the chance to work "on" the business instead of "in" the business. All in all, Autotask and the BIG are great programs."

Paving the Road to Profitability

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Group

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