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John Brooks, left, Les Rowe, Jordan Rowe and Ben Morrow are among Liberty Technical Solutions' 10 employees who manage 50 clients.

Liberty Technical Solutions LLC

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Services/Products: Computer consulting, network management, project design and website development, and hardware and software sales
2012 Revenues: \$500,000
Employees: 10

Remote Controllers

With technology at the core, Marshfield-based Liberty Technical Solutions splits staff between two states and serves clients in six

by Eric Olson · eolson@sbj.net

Leaning heavily on technological expertise, California native Scott Jones found he didn't have to forsake his budding business to immerse his family into Midwestern culture.

A year after founding Liberty Technical Solutions LLC as a one-man computer consultant in California, Jones and his family embarked on a journey to find open spaces and a slower pace. They settled in southwest Missouri.

The network engineer by trade realized the move was risky for his fledgling firm and its five clients that received computer consulting and network management.

"I had a customer base in California and really didn't know if I'd be able to keep them. As it worked out, I did," Jones says via telephone while on a business and family trip in Southern California. "I had mastered remote technology before it was very popular."

About half a dozen years after hiring his first employee and opening an office in Marshfield, Liberty Technical Solutions employs 10 and manages more than 50 client accounts.

The California connection remains, as three employees work remotely in Monterey, Calif., and Jones plans to

open an office there this year as he positions the company to hit its 2013 revenue goal of \$750,000 – a level reached in 2007 before the recession.

"It was a reset for us, and we're building back up," he says of the economic dip. "We purposely pursued a broader customer base."

Outsource work

From the Marshfield office, network engineer Les Rowe manages seven information technology technicians, two of whom work in California.

"We're the IT department for a business," Jones says, noting Liberty Technical staff members help

design clients' technical architecture, build project budgets, and perform hardware and software research.

Government and municipal clients represent the majority of Liberty's work at nearly 30 percent, followed by a fairly even split between nonprofits and health care agencies. Small and midsize firms, such as First Fruits of Zion publishing company in Marshfield, represent the remainder, Jones says.

Liberty covers IT needs for the governments in Webster and Texas counties, as well as the city of Marshfield and its police and fire departments.

John Cooper, wastewater treatment superintendent for the city of Marshfield, says Liberty connected

the municipality with Canadian-based Trihedral for an upgrade to its water monitoring systems. In about 90 days, he says Liberty researched the market and collected pricing within its budget, and the supervisory control and data acquisition system has been on line for about a year.

Cooper and other team members stay connected to the city's three water towers, three wells, 12 lift stations, one boost pump and its water treatment facility from multiple computer devices.

"I can actually see and control that equipment from my tablet," he says of the \$10,000 system that allows him to turn on or off water pumps from remote locations, for instance. "I was really leery, but things went really smoothly. I'm computer literate, but that might be saying a little too much. They can make me understand it."

Cooper says the city is currently bidding out its full computer network management contract, and Liberty is among the bidders.

Rapid movement

Last year, Liberty rolled out a managed services model with flat rates covering remote monitoring and proactive support, data backup, disaster recovery and maintenance of voice and data networks. Based on technology equipment and staff sizes, Jones says clients' monthly rates range from \$600 for a small accounting firm to \$7,000 for a 50-workstation construction development outfit.

Clients have responded by moving from the "break-fix model" and Jones says revenues have shifted to more than 40 percent in managed services. As further migration occurs, he expects 80 percent of revenues in managed services by year's end. "We've been methodically migrating our customers over," he says, in order to responsibly handle the demand.

Clients are sprinkled in six states,

though the bulk of work resides where technicians are on the ground.

To serve the states without Liberty Technical staff, Jones partnered with San Diego-based Technology Assurance Group, which provides management, human resources and marketing services and financial assistance to some 100 independent IT companies. "If I've got a customer who is traveling or at a remote site with an issue, they can help us out," he says of the \$18,000 annual service that increases his company's reach with access to a TAG partner in every state.

Jones says the association helps his firm stay abreast in a rapidly changing industry.

"We have to be very adaptable," he says, pointing to the recent transition to Voice over Internet Protocol from private branch exchange telephone systems. "Your phone system is now a computer on the network. There used to be the phone guy and the computer guy."

"Now, they're all the same person, because you're managing devices on the network. Voice companies and data companies are either taking on each other's skill sets, buying each other out or running each other out of business."

Acknowledging relevance keeps companies in the game, Jones is emphasizing customer service in his hiring practices.

"We have a difficult time finding quality technical help," he says. "Typically, a technical person is really focused but not the most friendly in the world."

To combat the challenge, Jones hires with personality and customer service skills in mind and teaches the technical side through an apprenticeship program.

He's planning to add a technician and sales person this year in the Marshfield office to build revenues from the \$500,000 recorded in 2012.



Scott Jones emphasizes customer service skills in hiring technicians.

