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Home Grown: TouchPoint Networks

TouchPoint Networks of Medford provides voice and data solutions for businesses

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Chuck Whiteley works at TouchPoint Networks Wednesday in Medford.

Julia Moore

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Editor's note: This is one in a weekly series of profiles on locally owned and operated businesses in Southern Oregon.

What do you do and how long have you been doing it? (Chuck Whiteley speaking) We provide voice and data solutions for businesses, installing business telephone systems. We specialize in Voice Over Internet Protocol business telephone systems that are compatible with office computers. We had 25 employees at the top of the real estate bubble when the economy was screaming. We're smaller now, but we operate throughout Oregon and Washington.

How long have you lived in the Rogue Valley? My wife, Lisa, and I moved here in 1993 from Fresno, Calif. We were looking for a better place to raise our kids and we found it.

What inspired you to go into this line of work? When I got out of the Air Force in 1981, I went to work for my father in Fresno. He owned a business telephone company, Independent Communication Systems, in the Central Valley of California.

What decision or action would you change if you could do it again? Almost nine years ago we purchased two branch offices from a company called Americom. One of those offices was in Portland and one was in Seattle. Portland has been a huge success, but we really struggled managing the Seattle office — it was just too far away to manage with the people we had. We waited way too long to close that office, and it almost took us under. It drained us, and we were lucky to survive.

What's the toughest business decision you've made? More than two years ago, Gary, Tamara and I decided to buy out our partner, Dennis Poulin. I really struggled with that decision; I spent many hours in prayer. So far, it was a good decision. The tough part was the commitment of cash over five years, and I have an adverse reaction to owing people money, but we've only got a couple of years left.

Who are your competitors? Lan Tel in Medford and Helix in Medford, but most of the ones around here are real small. Overall, there are many companies in our space. We have to compete with the electrical companies, data companies, dial-tone providers and other voice companies.

What are your goals? We were known as Best Tel until a year ago. The reason we renamed the company was because we've changed what we do. Originally, we were just doing business telephone systems, and now we're doing more data networks. We changed our name because it sounded so voice-centric. I don't see us growing much in the way of territory, mainly because it means so much travel. We actually have more business in Washington than when we had our office in Seattle. Our interest is going into further data applications. Part of that will require training existing employees on data applications and hiring additional data people with advance data certifications.

What training or education did you need? Training is one of those things that you never quite get there, because our industry is always in a state of change. I started out as a flight simulator technician in the Air Force and attended Fresno State, then spent years in college working toward my computer science degree. I've been taking all kinds of business classes ever since. We get training from our manufacturers, and we have to pay for those classes, wages and per diem. I was asked a long time ago, "What if you train your employees and they leave?" And I asked, "What if we don't train them and they stay?" I'd rather be the envy of my competitors.

What's your advice for budding entrepreneurs? Find something you are passionate about and choose that for your business. Find an industry group to join so you can learn from other companies in your same field. Learn from the mistakes of others. We belong to a group called Technology Assurance Group. They have helped us make some really good decisions over the years. Make sure that you spend enough time working on your business, not just in your business.

To suggest ideas for this column, about businesses that are at least five years old, contact reporter Greg Stiles at 541-776-4463 or email business@mailtribune.com.

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