Growing up fast
IT company goes from spare bedroom to big space
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SOUTHSIDE -- Mark Schnitzius (BSBA '99) and Gray Mabry (BSTEL '00), 1999 and 2000 University of Florida graduates, respectively, founded iVenture Solutions Inc. six years ago in a spare bedroom in Orange Park.

Today, with about 350 clients, the information technology company is emerging as a leader in Northeast Florida for providing IT network consulting and managed services for small and medium-sized businesses. Revenue, $2.2 million in 2006, has more than doubled in the past two years and is projected to increase by 40 percent in 2007.

And in May, the company moved from a 2,400-square-foot office to a 7,300-square-foot space on the Southside, with a goal of increasing staff from 18 to 25 to serve a growing clientele.

It's a long way from the entrepreneurs' early years, economizing on office space, expenses and their own salaries, paying themselves what they needed to cover their bills. "It was like being back in college," Mabry said.

"We did our homework on why companies fail," Schnitzius said. "A lot of people start companies with business plans that say they're going to pay themselves $50,000. It doesn't work that way."

Lifestyle wasn't the only thing the duo sacrificed. They worked whatever hours it took to serve customers, do accounting and generate new business, often getting by on minimal sleep.

"When we started the company, we were prepared to put our lives on hold," Mabry said.

Keeping clients happy

These days, they look rather refreshed, with increased administrative staff, including their first controller.

Despite iVenture's growth, it has kept clients such as Robin Scott, practice administrator for Gastroenterology Associates of St. Augustine PA, happy.

"My experience is, as companies grow, you see a change in service," said Scott, who oversees IT for a six-server network with 50 work stations. "But that hasn't been the case."

As much as 30 percent of iVenture's business is related to software for health care. While the industry is seeking the benefits of digital record keeping, the requirements to keep such software running smoothly have gotten more complex.
That’s what brought Lynda Swetz, administrator for **Jacksonville Spine Center PA**, to iVenture in 2004. Swetz joined the spine center shortly before it moved toward electronic medical records, outgrowing the one-person IT company it had been using.

Swetz interviewed five companies to which peers in other medical practices referred her.

She particularly liked that iVenture prepared a book with equipment inventories and schematics of the center’s network for her to keep, something no one else offered.

"They told me what they thought I’d need today, in a year and in two to five years," Swetz said.

Like many of iVenture’s clients, Jacksonville Spine Center came for network consulting and stayed for network monitoring and maintenance.

The center is the kind of client iVenture likes because it’s willing to invest in what it needs for a healthy network.

"To be successful," Schnitzius said, "you have to tell the client what they have and their risk."

And the clients need "to listen to us," Mabry said. "Our goal is to set things up so we don’t get calls in the middle of the night."

**High school jobs**

Forming a company was not the first time Schnitzius and Mabry have worked together. While attending Orange Park High School -- a year apart -- Schnitzius was a frozen food manager in a grocery store where Mabry was a frozen food associate.

After graduating from UF, both worked for a short time for Fortune 500 companies' IT departments. And both soon concluded working in large corporations wasn’t for them.

Although they agree the market for the kind of work iVenture does is wide open, they believe the company has been able to increase its customer base by treating each one individually.

"We don’t stray from what we do," Schnitzius said.

That’s kept Paul Numbers, president of **Marketplace Federal Credit Union**, comfortable with how his small network is managed.

"It's been a very sound relationship," he said. "I sleep good at night."

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