

Software company's longterm view proves key to its survival

MicroAccounting Systems celebrates 20 years in a business that is littered with burst bubbles

By MIKEL KELLY
Of the Times

Vickie Reynolds, customer service manager for Durametal in Tualatin, is holding a stack of papers that looks like a couple of Portland phone books stuck together. This, she says, is an example of the budget report she used to have to generate twice a year.

Then she had to make many, many copies of that stack and send one to every salesperson in the company.

"It's at least two weeks of solid data every time," she said. "We had to copy them and FedEx them to every single salesperson in the world. And that's — *what?* — a monthlong process, I would say."

Enter Joe Taylor, president of MicroAccounting Systems Inc., a Beaverton software sales and service company that just turned 20 this spring.

MASI devised a program that keeps a running count on sales, on inventory numbers, on each salesperson's performance and it's accessed by anyone who needs to see it whenever they need to.

"So, instead of printing out all this paper and tearing it apart and mailing it, it's done in Excel so it's e-mailed to every salesman," said Taylor.

The fact that MASI is still going strong at 20 is no small feat in an industry where there are more victims than survivors.

What's the secret to their success? From its beginning, the company at 15050 S.W. Koll Parkway, Suite C, in Beaverton has bucked conventional industry wisdom that says software customization and hands-on customer service is a money-loser; high volume sales of off-the-shelf products are the way to go.

Instead, MASI has focused upon becoming experts in just



MIKEL KELLY/The Times

Joe Taylor, president of MicroAccounting Systems, looks over the shoulder of Durametal's Vickie Reynolds as she calls up a copy of the report his company devised to eliminate paperwork.

two brands of software.

Unlike most of its competitors, MASI customizes the software to meet the specific needs of each company it works with — and then backs that up with customer support available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Customers not only can talk with a real person, but they also can talk with a person who knows and understands their unique situation.

And they can call the same number they have been calling for the past 20 years.

"Some of the vendors sell you the product, get you up and running and leave," said Taylor. "And I like to say, 'we sell you the product, get you up and running and stay.'"

"I was a CPA," said Taylor, explaining how he came to start the business two decades ago. He'd worked with other big companies, and the pattern was, he'd help them select software to run their businesses, set it all up — and then leave.

"I really didn't like to leave," said Taylor. "The fun part was just beginning."

So, he decided to become a vendor himself — starting the

company, in fact, in his home.

MASI's labor-intensive approach has been the key to building lasting business partnerships, and hence its longevity.

Today the company has 19 employees, a second office in Bellevue, Wash., and annual revenue of more than \$2.7 million. It serves more than 150 clients in 25 states, primarily in manufacturing, wholesale distribution and software development.

The key to MASI's success, according to Taylor, is the fact that they listen to the customer.

Elsewhere in the business, he said, the emphasis is on sales volume more than follow-up service.

But MASI's approach, he said, is to "give the customer what it wants."

"It's really a trade-off between the flash-in-the-pan or the jack rabbit approach," said Taylor. "We've sold the same software package for 20 years.

"We don't push heavy sales volume; we push long-term relationships with our customers," Taylor added.

"I wish we had this kind of support from all of our vendors," said Vickie Reynolds. "We're very, very spoiled."