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ALL FOR ONE, ONE FOR ALL

With employees sharing in decision-making and profits, company doubles earnings

By Chris Coletta

RALEIGH - When Dale Tincher offered to hire an extra worker to lessen the workload on his

CONSULTWEBS

Founded: 1998

Owner: Dale Tincher

Business: Web design for law firms

Projected 2007 revenue: \$4M

staff at Raleigh Web design firm ConsultWebs, the employees' response was a no-brainer for them: "Thanks, but no thanks."

Counterintuitive? Not at ConsultWebs, which includes its nine employees in decision-making and, more importantly, gives them a share of the profits.

Thus, the no-brainer answer: With an additional employee, each piece of the profit pie would have been a little smaller.

"We work very, very hard to build a quality staff," Tincher says.

ConsultWebs, an 8-year-old company that builds Web sites for law firms and then works to get them high rankings on search engines, has doubled revenue and profit every year since its inception. With revenue of \$2.2 million in 2006, the company boasts of more than 300 client Web sites across the country.

While hiring good people seems an obvious enough thing to do, it's not always done at penny-pinching startups, and Tincher says those business owners later pay.

Take subcontractors. For a while, ConsultWebs hired outside firms to provide some of its consulting and design work. It stopped that practice after ConsultWebs' employees said they were capable of doing the job better - and cheaper.

The company still uses more than a dozen subcontractors for basic Web maintenance, but every change to a client's site goes through ConsultWebs' Raleigh office.

Such policies keep workers busy. Says Vice President Lisa Vaughn, who works for the company remotely from her Kentucky home: "Time is not free. When I'm sleeping, the company's paying for me to sleep."

Having a good staff in place means the work gets done, Vaughn says. And for an added incentive, there's the profit-sharing arrangement, which not only keeps individual employees on their toes but motivates them to encourage co-workers to be diligent.

"One thing that speaks volumes about how our team works together is our incentive plan," Vaughn says. "One person cannot, by themselves, make a big enough difference in the bottom line to make a difference in the incentive plan. We all have to do our part."

That was never more clear than in the "lean years," Vaughn says, when she and Tincher had to sleep in an airport because the company didn't have the money to pay for a hotel room. The company was taking all business that came its way and trying to expand via word of mouth.

Now, ConsultWebs turns away some 75 percent of companies that inquire about its services, and Tincher says clients frequently joke about having to get in line to retain his company's services.

His employees tease him about how he turns down business, but he says he understands it's no longer worth it to work with companies that aren't serious about building the sort of content-laden, work-intensive Web sites that will attract customers and score high on search engines.

Clients with which the company does work offer testimonials. Among them are local clients including Poyner & Spruill, divorce firm



STEVE WILSON

Dale Tincher, owner of ConsultWebs, works by himself on a laptop at his company's office in Raleigh, but he is far from alone in charting the direction of his company.

Charles R. Ullman & Associates and estate firm Brady, Nordgren, Morton & Malone.

A testimonial from Ellen Kinsinger of Poyner & Spruill cites the company's high quality work and reasonable prices. Charles Ullman sings the praises of ConsultWebs' professional staff and the business he's pulled from his firm's Web presence. Dan Brady of Brady Nordgren says the company is straightforward and honest.

Tincher says he'll put any prospective client in touch with current customers. Word of mouth is ConsultWebs' most powerful sales tool, he says.

But it's still unclear just how much the company wants to leverage it. With prospective clients knocking on its doors, rapid growth is possible - but it could lead to a drop in quality, taking away what the company views as its greatest advantage over its competitors.

What is clear, however, is that Tincher isn't about to make a unilateral decision on the matter.

"We want this to be our company," he says, referring to his profit-sharing employees.

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