

Adaptive Solutions lays down the law

IT firm gives attorneys computer support they need

GROWTH STRATEGIES



CURT HUDSON

Chuck Davis, in the computer room of one of his Center City clients, is courting corporate legal departments.

NORRISTOWN — When the founders of Adaptive Solutions set out to form their own technology consulting firm, finding their niche came easy. With previous experience delivering information-technology support within local law firms, the partners understood what lawyers need from a tech support firm.

“They need someone who can talk to them as a professional, someone who can hear the legal mumbo-jumbo and understand it, and then turn it back into technology solutions,” President Chuck Davis said.

Over the course of a decade, that simple premise has helped Adaptive Technologies grow to become a \$4 million firm with 27 employees.

ADAM STONE
SPECIAL TO THE BUSINESS JOURNAL

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Chuck Davis
Adaptive Solutions

The company has shown steady growth since its inception in 1998.

With an average \$100,000 to \$200,000 deal

size, Adaptive specializes in helping midsize law firms boost their IT capabilities so that those firms can better compete against larger firms.

These lawyers typically do not have access to the sophisticated systems found in larger firms. Enter Adaptive, with tools such as content management (where did we put our stuff?), data backup (how do we save our stuff?) and network support (how can we use our stuff?), any or all of which may be missing in a client’s IT arsenal.

“A lot of the firms we walk in to have cobbled together systems that are down more than they are up,” Davis said.

Some of these IT shortcomings are woven into the very nature of legal practice. “A lot of

ADAPTIVE: Norristown company brings its industry-specific expertise to the table

these guys who are lawyers think they know everything, and so they try to take it on themselves or else they know a buddy and that buddy is not giving their firm the best service,” Davis said.

UP CLOSE

COMPANY: Adaptive Solutions Inc.

LOCATION: 516 Dekalb St., Norristown, Pa. 19401

OWNERS: Chuck Davis, with founding partners Dean Bartholomew and Adam Doblo

TYPE OF COMPANY: Technology services geared to law firms and corporate law departments

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 27

2005 REVENUE: \$2.2 million

2006 REVENUE: \$2.8 million

2007 REVENUE: \$4 million

LESSONS LEARNED: The right niche pays.

Adaptive Solutions has found success by delivering IT help to the legal world, a community in sore need of technology guidance.

A harsh assessment of one’s clientele? Perhaps, but that kind of straight talk has won the company more business than it has lost. These law firms know they need help.

Among other things, Adaptive helps by bringing to the table not just a knowledge of networks, but an industry-specific understanding, an ability to address the many particular facets of legal practice.

“What about the tax guy who is using a particular software package to manage estates, or another lawyer that is doing a very sophisticated brief and needs to redline it from version one to version two? Lawyers create very sophisticated documents, and their formatting is very sophisticated as well, so they need specialized software to do that.”

Customers say they appreciate that level of technological specialization.

“They have all levels of engineers, from the help desk through the Microsoft Exchange certified engineers,” said Adelaine Williams, director of administration at Kaplin Stewart in Blue Bell. “So I never feel like I am paying someone to learn the program.”

Such praise is an integral part of the company’s growth strategy. Davis does not hesitate to ask for the customer testimonials and referrals that generate a preponderance of his new business.

He also is not shy about making his presence known through participation in industry groups such as the Association of Legal Administrators and also ILTA, the International Legal Technology Association.

To win at the association game, you’ve got to be patient, Davis said. “We used to go to these dinners and feel like we were wasting our time, but really it takes three to five years to see the

benefits of it. It takes time for people to get a comfort level with you. They see too many people come one year and be gone the next. They want to make sure you will be sticking around.”

Now firmly established in the middle-market sector, Adaptive has set its sights higher, courting the legal departments of big corporations and landing such clients as building supply manufacturer Saint-Gobain Corp. and banking company Lincoln Financial Group.

In the big picture, Davis said, wins among larger corporations could give Adaptive the boost it needs to begin taking on projects within the legal offices of Fortune 500 firms. That being said, the rules here are somewhat different than in small independent law firms, where a roomful of partners can make a decision to purchase IT services.

In the corporate world there may be a compliance department, an IT chief and sundry other executives to convince. Davis has been able expedite the process by learning his way around corporate hierarchies, digging down into the org chart. If he can get all the right players in the room at the start, deals tend to get done more quickly.

In any case, the extra hoops are worth jumping, Davis said. It’s all about the snowball effect.

“As you grow and your reputation gets stronger, you can graduate into larger deals, and from there into larger clients.” The strategy has worked so far for Adaptive, and things show no sign of slowing down. ■