

E-Briefs

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E-BRIEFS

The Community and Economic Development Program at Michigan State University is developing a set of e-briefs to highlight how businesses are making innovative use of digital technologies to improve their business practices.

E-briefs provide an overview of the innovative solutions adopted by businesses and the benefits that follow. It is intended to serve as an example for other businesses, economic development agencies, and community organizations interested in the rise of Internet-enabled business. Our purpose is to foster an exchange of ideas about e-business in order to assist Michigan's small and medium-sized businesses to identify new business opportunities and overcome the challenges associated with adapting to emerging technologies and global competition.

If you own a business or know of one that is using new technologies to enhance its business practices, we would be interested in spotlighting them in e-briefs. Please notify us by sending an email to cedp@msu.edu with "e-briefs" in the subject line.

E-BRIEF OVERVIEWS

[Cascade Engineering, Inc.](#)

This Grand Rapids-based manufacturer of plastic products for automotive and industrial markets upgraded to an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system to standardize processes, improve efficiency, and enable e-commerce capabilities.

[Spartan Internet Consulting Corp.](#)

Based in Lansing, Spartan Internet Consulting Corporation provides web-based business solutions, strategic website development and design, internet marketing, e-commerce solutions, and consulting services. The company launched MyStoreDot.com services to provide e-business tools to small businesses and entrepreneurs.

[ReCellular, Inc.](#)

This wholesale cellular phone company from Dexter, Michigan, specializes in refurbishing, reconditioning, reselling, recycling and trading wireless phones, accessories, and equipment. ReCellular uses multiple web interfaces to manage the flow of used digital equipment from collection through resale.

Cascade Engineering, Inc.

Thomas Adelaar, 2004

Cascade Engineering, Inc. researches, designs, and manufactures engineered plastic products for the automotive, solid waste, and industrial markets. Founded in 1973 by Fred Keller (current chairman and CEO), the company had annual sales of \$169.9 million and employed 1,200 people worldwide, in 2003. Its engineering capability includes design analysis and prototyping, large tonnage molding, and plastics processing. The company's global partners allow it to provide innovative solutions to customers as well as leading-edge products and services under the Cascade Engineering brand.

It is important to determine the direction of the company and mirror the IT strategic plan with the overall plan of the company.

John Kowalski, 2004

The Challenge

Cascade Engineering's current system was not accessible to the firm's smaller divisions; nor was it capable of tracking inventory by bar code, demanded by an increasing number of the company's customers. The question was whether to upgrade the current system or to replace it with new ERP software. Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software is a business management system that integrates all facets of business, including planning, manufacturing, sales, marketing, inventory control, order tracking, customer service, finance, and human resources.

The former option would cost less, while the latter would cost more to purchase and implement, but would serve future business needs better. Cascade chose the latter.

The Solution

Cascade Engineering, Inc. purchased a new ERP system and invested in training, so that everyone—from senior management to end-users—was committed to making the implementation successful.

The Results

The new ERP system allowed Cascade Engineering, Inc. to:

- Integrate engineering processes and production across the firm's divisions
- Introduce bar-coding to improve inventory management and shipping
- Manage e-commerce capabilities, including more efficient order tracking
- Align customer schedules with production and shipping schedules
- Produce real-time financial data reports to enable informed decision-making

Special thanks to John Kowalski (kowalskiJ@cascadeng.com), marketing and communications manager from Cascade Engineering for providing information for this e-brief. Learn more about Cascade Engineering, Inc. at www.cascadeng.com

Spartan Internet Consulting Corp.

Thomas Adelaar, 2004

Spartan Internet Consulting Corp. provides a broad range of Internet-related services including strategic Web site development, custom Web programming, e-commerce capabilities, and consulting services. Founded in 1997 by Ryan Vartoogian, the company is headquartered in downtown Lansing (Michigan) and draws upon talent associated with local universities. It also has offices in Detroit and Washington, D.C.

The Challenge

Many clients sought out Spartan Internet because they believed setting up an on-line store was confusing, complicated, and expensive. They demanded web development services to start on-line stores.

The Solution

In response, Spartan Internet launched StartMyStore.com, a convenient, easy-to-use way for firms to sell their products on the Internet.

The service allows entrepreneurs who have little or no programming knowledge to launch their businesses on the Internet.

The Results

Through StartMyStore.com, Spartan Internet has provided hundreds of small and medium sized businesses an inexpensive framework to conduct business online. Their easy-to-use point-and-click menus allow access to:

- professionally designed Web page templates
- options to add/remove product lists
- easy updates of product and price information
- automatic shipping and tax calculations
- real-time integration with FedEx and UPS tracking and shipping services
- credit card processing
- returns handling
- other store management tools.

High-speed cable Internet access, available through a state supported pilot program, put me on a level playing field with big companies. Access to this technology birthed my company. The State of Michigan should be much more aggressive in attracting test-bed technologies such as broadband wireless.

Ryan Vartoogian, 1994

Special thanks to Ryan Vartoogian (ryan@spartaninternet.com) President, CEO and Founder of Spartan Internet Consulting Corp. for providing information for this e-brief. For more information about Spartan Internet Consulting Corp., visit www.spartaninternet.com

ReCellular Inc.

Thomas Adelaar, 2004

ReCellular Inc., based in Dexter, Michigan is a pioneer in refurbishing, reselling and recycling electronic gadgets such as cellular phones, pagers, PDAs and other handheld electronics. Established in 1991, ReCellular collects these devices from different sources in the United States, refurbishes them and sells them to customers who cannot otherwise afford these highly priced goods.

Initially set up to recycle computers, ReCellular evolved into the largest value-added recycling company of secondary wireless handsets. The company's recycling program shares its revenues with donors, helps protect the environment, provides developing markets with access to technology and funds charities.

Its primary market is outside the United States, mainly Latin America and more than 60 percent of the handsets are sold internationally. Employing 160 people, the 12-year old company had revenues of \$44 million and processed more than 5 million used handsets and accessories in 2003.

The Challenge

ReCellular's challenge is to identify and bring together the sources of used electronics and those interested in buying the recycled products. And, its success is based on its ability to collect these devices, refurbish them efficiently and sell them. And, since most of its clients are based outside the country, the creation of an online system that provides a common ground for transactions was necessary.

The Solution

ReCellular developed multiple Web sites integrated with its inventory to attract sources of used electronics, manage the refurbishment process and sell the products to clients.

The Results

The company created two different web sites to enable the collection and distribution of items while a third was dedicated for commercial programs dealing with trade-in type programs.

- www.wirelessrecycling.com, advertises ReCellular's services, coordinates donations from individuals and partner organizations, and manages donations that benefit nonprofit organizations.
- www.recellular.net is the marketplace for buyers and has a logistical component to help customers bid for orders, track shipping and coordinate delivery.
- Another Web site, used internally, manages the workflow in the different stages of the refurbishment process.

Special thanks to Chuck Newman (cnewman@recellular.com), President, CEO, and Founder of ReCellular, Inc. and to Eric J. Forster (eforster@recellular.com), Vice President, Marketing and Sales of ReCellular, Inc. for providing information for this e-brief. For more information about ReCellular, please visit, www.recellular.net