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ENTERPRISE

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Software for free

Journyx hopes giving away products to small companies eventually will pay huge dividends

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Curt Finch knows the value in giving -- especially some of his own company's software.

[Journyx Inc.](#) makes its Timesheets software available for download for free for companies with ten or fewer users.

While creating beaucoup name recognition, "we've effectively tripled our marketing budget," says Finch, CEO of Journyx.

"A good percentage of the customers grow and expand and use the application as they expand," says Bill Balcezak, vice president of professional services for Journyx. "Our current strategy is catering to large accounts with hundreds, if not thousands of users."

Spreading the application to small businesses opens the door for small business employees who move to larger businesses to bring the application with them, Balcezak says.

"We never want to be in the 'shelfware' business," Finch says.

Because the application is downloadable, if a company pays for the program, it must fit that company's needs.

Journyx isn't trying to trick susceptible customers into buying relatively useless software. Finch prefers more symbiotic relationships.

When dealing with larger companies, Balcezak cites a "land and expand" strategy: "We install the application at the department level, the business unit level. We deliver good customer service, deployment and support after installation. Once you've got a team of consultants deriving business value, it's pretty obvious that this is high value at a low cost."

Customer service and tech support is an important link.

"We've done a great job of building a solid professional services team. We have a core group of black belts," Balcezak says.

A major hurdle for Journyx was the technical difficulty in creating an application user-friendly enough for small businesses to download and install on their own, but complex enough to track time, billing and project management information for such heavyweight clients as IBM Corp. and Honda Motor Co. Inc.

"There are significant challenges we've worked through," development manager John Maddalozzo says. "We had to develop a high-powered application suited for multiple servers, but lightweight enough for people to download and install onto home computers."

Finch notes that Journyx Timesheets does more than merely keep timesheets.

"It does automated payroll, customer management, expenses, mileage...there's a lot to it."

When it comes to product development, though, "there's never a lack of requests for functionality, but we want to grow intelligently so it's not unwieldy," Finch says.

"We've made it really easy for hosting ourselves," Maddalozzo says.

For a small monthly fee, companies can avoid taking on the worries of maintenance. Journyx can host the application and take care of back-ups and security.

"We know our half better than they do, anyhow," Finch says.

Maddalozzo cites the appeal for Journyx hosting the application in "already strained IT resources in many companies, even in large IT environments."

When Journyx was approaching a crossroads in 1997, the Internet was just becoming mainstream.

"The Web was pretty new, then, and it was widely applicable to help solve the problem of getting the application out there," Finch says.

Journyx jumped on the Internet bandwagon, and the rest is history.

It wasn't all smooth sailing, though.

"When I started I didn't have much management experience, but I thought I did," Finch says.

A board of advisers comprising management gurus from organizations such as NASA and Dell Inc. offered guidance.

"Some great people took an interest in us and gave us some good advice," Maddalozzo says.

That type of help can keep young companies from suffering major stumbles.

"You can always benefit by getting advice from experienced people," University of Texas business professor William Carner says.

Finch says Journyx is completely self-supporting.

"We grew from customer revenue and didn't take money from mom and dad," Finch says. "We're proud of that."

As a company that never took investment capital, Maddalozzo acknowledges that creates an interesting set of roadblocks.

"In hiring, we're pay-as-you go," Maddalozzo says. "We can't use recruiters, so we've been really fortunate to find such talented people."

Facing the future, Finch isn't worried.

"We're pretty scrappy," Finch says. "We've taken everything that we've been faced with for the last eight years, and I can't see that changing."

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