

Small Business Profile

Signs of success: StrandVision updates through the Internet

BY KATIE MCKY WHILE STARTING ONE COMPANY MIGHT BE ENOUGH for some people, entrepreneurs like Eau Claire's Mike Strand, 44, can't wait to do it all again.

His first company was StrandWare, which created software to make barcode labels for a variety of industries. He sold it to the Teklynx division of Milwaukee's Brady Corp. in November 2001.

"Then I took a break," Strand said. "I spent the summer with my family."

Strand also spent the summer contemplating what he would have done differently, if he had it to do all over again.

"When I owned StrandWare, I never had the time to congratulate and motivate employees," he recalled. "I decided I would write a program that would allow me to



A StrandVision kiosk in a Bank of Ann Arbor branch.

communicate with employees at my next company, via electronic signage, no matter where I was, using the Internet."

From that idea grew a whole new business, StrandVision LLC. Strand wrote software to deliver digital signage content directly over the Internet to televisions and computer displays in subscribers' offices and businesses. StrandVision's patent-pending approach eliminates the need for complex and expensive on-site hardware. The Web-based service is easy to use so nearly anyone in an office can maintain and quickly distribute text messages and graphics, including advertisements and video content.

"You can type text or create an image and even update it from home," said Strand.

Whereas Strand conceived of the system for communicating with employees, it is mainly used to communicate with clientele.

"Customers are often frustrated by waiting. A bank president can mount a plasma screen TV in a lobby. Through that screen, the president could apprise his customers of new services. The messages won't diminish wait times, but they can seem to have that effect."

Not only can the screens disseminate new product information and seem to diminish waiting time, the messages can also be targeted to shifting demographics in the course of a day, week, or month.

"In banking, the first week of the month is when older people often come in to

cash their Social Security checks. More fiscally conservative investment messages can be presented then. When mothers arrive with children later in the day, the bank can address their needs through StrandVision."

There are other options. "We have local weather built into the system, and news updates that scroll across the bottom of the screen."

Of course, the technology can also be used in employee lounges, as was first intended.

"They can convey safety data. A CEO or manager can also commend certain employees or alert the staff to upcoming events."

StrandVision is sold as a low-cost monthly subscription service, and is available directly or through a network of authorized installers who will set up the kiosks or digital signage and load the software.

"We're getting a lot of repeat business. We just had a bank commit to three years of service. That's a strong statement. Most companies do a pilot installation. Then they spread to other outlets."

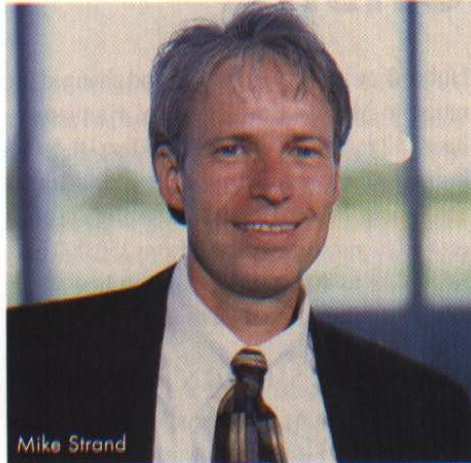
Stand attracted help from several sources as he built his new business. In June 2005, StrandVision (then called Online-Kiosks.net) placed first in the information technology/e-commerce category and received \$10,000 at the Wisconsin Governor's Business Plan Contest organized through the Wisconsin Technology Council. In October 2005, StrandVision received another \$10,000 when it won the Create Your Own Business Competition presented by the Eau Claire Area Economic Development Corp.

And the Chippewa Valley Angel Investors Network LLC lent \$250,000 to StrandVision.

StrandVision's success can be quantified in other ways.

"We've had a 600% increase in sales over the last year," said Strand. "And we now have over 5,000 visitors per month to our Web site. Just a year ago, we only averaged 1,000. Our new sign-ups are averaging 50 per month."

Current clients include all the branches of



Mike Strand

the Bank of Ann Arbor, NAPA Auto Parts, Bush's Beans, and Bombardier Recreational Products Inc.

StrandVision will provide its software to Richardson Electronics Ltd., a global provider of display solutions, in a partnership arrangement. It is also partnering with content providers, such as DataCall Technologies. "We'll be a distributor of their XML feeds," said Strand, "which give current traffic conditions for a given zip code. We take care of selling that service to our customers and DataCall gives us a discount.

"When you blend with other vendors, it makes you more versatile and able to satisfy more customers, thus making it a win for the customers too."

Strand anticipates expansion in Eau Claire. "We expect to hire 20 to 30 new employees."

What does the veteran entrepreneur like best about his burgeoning new business?

"The things that are fun and challenging are the obstacles. What we're doing is new ground. In a lot of cases, it hasn't been covered by anybody. We have to create the technology, so it's our creativity that powers us." □

In order to present more success stories about businesses in *Corporate Report Wisconsin*, we will include profiles of small businesses as space permits. To submit your business for consideration, send an e-mail to crweditor@wistrails.com.