

Diagnosis: Success

WITC grad's home-grown business expands across 33 states

By Shawnda Schelinder
Photo by Jed Carlson

In this global economy, career opportunities are around every virtual corner. When faced with possible reduction in work hours or even layoff, WITC graduate J.P. Damico found a creative way to expand his home business. Using technology and tapping into his entrepreneurial spirit, Damico's After Hours Computer Repair is now in 140 cities across 33 states and is managed entirely from Damico's home office in Duluth, Minn.

The expansion of Damico's home business was born out of necessity.

"After Hours Computer Repair started in the spring of 2007," Damico says. "I was working for the Duluth Public School District full time and could not

take the calls while I was working, so I hired a receptionist who answered calls and scheduled service calls during the day."

But school district cutbacks meant he might be laid off.

"I decided to expand the business rather than try to find a new job in the poor economy," Damico says. "I opened up in nine additional locations in Minnesota and Wisconsin. I dropped down to working part time for the district and eventually quit in the summer of 2009. I have been expanding the business ever since."

Damico credits his computer networking technician degree from WITC for providing him with the hands-on training required for professional repair work.

"WITC taught me many things about the fundamentals of technology, he says. "A lot of technicians have experience working with computers, but they do not have the experience with the core infrastructure that makes that technology tick. WITC gave me that knowledge, so that I not only know the solution, but I understand the problem. Because I know how the computer is working under the hood, I feel extremely confident in tackling the problem and coming up with the best solution."

After Hours is currently in 140 locations, but Damico has hopes to grow that number to 300.

"The goal is to blanket the U.S. and have technicians 20-30 miles from you," Damico says.

It might seem pretty lofty, but this was the vision from day one, according to Damico.

"With all of this expansion, it is still a home business," he says. "There is no need for the overhead of a traditional office space. The receptionists (now called dispatchers) answer calls in their own homes and on their own schedules."



In fact, the entire process is automated – from dispatchers contacting the technicians to billing the clients to paying staff. Even the hiring of dispatchers and technicians is achieved through technology.

Even with a multitude of technology at his fingertips, the task of keeping in contact with dozens of employees in locations throughout the country still has its difficulties such as scheduling and supervision.

"Nobody is going to tell you to start your day or to get a project finished by a deadline," Damico says. "You really need to motivate yourself. With that being said, nobody will tell you to stop either. A lot of businessowners burn out over time. It is important to keep a healthy balance of business and pleasure."

After Hours Computer Repair's success prompted Damico to open a subsidiary company. OverTime IT Solutions serves as an internal help desk for small businesses. The company incorporates local technicians, but also has After Hours' 150 technicians available for assistance. ■

So you want to start your own business from home?

The idea of ditching the 9-to-5 routine and working from home with your own business may be attractive to many. But, there are many factors to consider. J.P. Damico offers items to consider before making the jump.

- Research taxes. Know what you are getting into and what the tax implications are. Taxes can be a pain, but know them ahead of time before they bite you later.
- Start slow. Grandiose plans are great, but you need to start somewhere and get a solid foundation. Once you have your footing and you know your customers, use that information to help you grow your business.

