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Ted Schuman: Master of Communications Skills

Scottsdale telecom entrepreneur carves his own path to success

by Brett Maxwell

NEARLY 20 YEARS ago while working for a long-distance company called Allnet Communications, Ted Schuman decided he had the necessary tools to run his own telecommunications company, so he saved up some money, took out a line of credit, and became CEO of what would eventually become an award-winning company. PlanetOne Communications, providing businesses with a free audit of telecommunication expenses and then recommending which of its more than 180 carriers can provide the best service, was named to *Inc. Magazine's* exclusive list of the Fastest-Growing Private Companies in America for 2011.

PlanetOne saw revenue jump from \$4.8 million in 2007 to \$8.2 million in 2010 — a 71 percent boost — and the company just posted its 2011 revenue at \$10.2 million, a 24.4 percent increase over 2010. However, success did not come immediately or easily for the Scottsdale company. Schuman had to learn on the fly about what it takes to run a successful telecommunications business. “I’m self taught,” Schuman explains. “There wasn’t a model or an entity to emulate.” He says it took time to craft a business model that would help his company efficiently cater to the specific needs of each client. His company also endured the market crash of the dot-com industry that doomed countless communication companies a decade ago. “The telecom sector blew up overnight,” Schuman says. “We went from being *en vogue* to out of fashion and out of touch.”

Schuman credits the company’s ability to survive the troubling times to advice he received from his attorney. “[My attorney] says, ‘Go back and worry about making money this month, don’t look six months down the road,’” Schuman recalls. “It was overly simplified but couldn’t have resonated any louder. There was a lot of clarity in that comment.” Schuman heeded the advice and did what he could to make each day a successful one. “We tore the rear-view mirror out of our corporate car ... and looked forward and didn’t sit around and commiserate about [the state of the industry].” Schuman says this is the attitude and philosophy helping propel PlanetOne into the elite ranks of the telecom industry. The company has managed to post significant net growth every year since the bubble burst on the dot-com boom.

Another pillar that stabilizes the structure of Schuman’s philosophy is a fading art form in the modern business world — the personal touch. Face-to-face meetings and business handshakes are being phased out by Skype conference calls and do-it-all smart phones. In late 2010, PlanetOne was vying against seven other companies for a telecom partnership with American Express. Unlike his competitors, who either e-mailed or shipped proposals to American Express as requested, Schuman caught a red-eye flight from Phoenix to New York so he could hand-deliver the documents and give a sales pitch. PlanetOne and American Express have been partners ever

since. “It’s really the secret sauce, if you will, to what’s been the cornerstone of the foundation that [PlanetOne] builds upon,” Schuman says of face-to-face interaction.

The personal touch extends to PlanetOne’s 15 handpicked employees, who average 15 years of experience in the telecom industry. Friday barbecues, sales incentive contests and trips to ball games are just a few examples of how Schuman invests in employee morale. Schuman has hired cleaning services to tidy up the houses and cars of sales contest winners. “We try to keep it fresh and exciting,” Schuman notes. Every year, a few employees are given international trips, which are awarded during the holidays.

“We’ve always held onto a few core values in growing PlanetOne: work hard, exceed expectations, provide value, do the common things uncommonly well,” Schuman says. Referring to the *Inc. Magazine* recognition, which he characterizes a “team trophy,” he says, “It’s taken us exactly 20 years to make it as an overnight success.” ■

PlanetOne Communications planetone.net

Numbers Speak Well for PlanetOne

- PlanetOne Communications was founded in 1992. The company does business with more than 180 carriers globally.
- The company’s revenue in 2010 was \$8.2 million.
- CEO Ted Schuman has projected a 27-percent revenue growth for 2011.
- PlanetOne Communications ranks 48th among private businesses in Metro Phoenix and 104th in the telecommunications industry nationally on *Inc. Magazine's* 2011 list of fastest-growing companies.
- Posting revenue of \$10.2 million for 2011, PlanetOne charts a 24.4-percent revenue growth over 2010.



Photo: PlanetOne Communications