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Making IT work for you

Consultant's passion inspires dual businesses

By Mark Watson

[Contact](#)

September 13, 2004

Edward Rothman saw that small businesses -- particularly the offices of professionals such as attorneys, doctors and financial planners -- need the help of a "temporary chief information officer," as it were, and started a business so he could fill the bill.

While talking with one of those clients, Rothman showed the client his elaborate home theater, and the client wanted one. So Rothman started a business to put together such systems.



Nikki Boertman/The Commercial Appeal

Edward and Kelly Rothman run Rothman Home Theatre and The Rothman Company, an information technology consultancy, from a home office.

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Now, he has two growing businesses: The Rothman Company, which is an information technology consultancy, and Rothman Home Theatre, through which he sets up home media centers.

"Both businesses reflect the same passion in my life for technology and the way it improves people's lives," Rothman said in his home office. "If it's work technology, you ask, 'Does it allow you to make more money and get home to your family more quickly?' If it's leisure technology, you ask, 'Does it allow you to enjoy your time more effectively?'"

Kathy Fish, proprietor of Fish & Associates Financial Services, said Rothman's revamping of the computer systems in her four-person office this summer has enhanced her company's efficiency.

"Having an internal Web site allows you to have stored documents in one place, and you don't have to go searching for them," Fish said. "That has helped us organize better."

Rothman also enhanced her system's security, which had suffered from occasional virus attacks that shut down the office for as many as five days.

"Just having better security makes me sleep better at night," she said. "If we can't get on the computer and get on the Internet, we can't do business."

A London native who formerly served as CIO of

THE ROTHMAN
COMPANY
ROTHMAN HOME
THEATRE

Head person: Edward Rothman, chief consultant

Address: 30 Lombardy

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Memphis-based Guardsmark, Rothman started his information consultancy April 16 and is already making an operating profit.

In 1988, he started a software business called Episys, which he sold in 1999. It is still operating.

So he had the experience of starting a business, and wanted to return to being his own boss, because he wanted the time flexibility and wanted to provide a time-flexible work environment for other people.

Number of employees:
Two

Phone Number: 432-6342

Web site:
rothmancompany.com

"The market for IT services is growing rapidly as corporations of all sizes realize that it is cheaper to rent the myriad skill sets required to run an efficient IT operation than to employ and under-utilize expensive professionals," Rothman said.

But companies are also hiring IT people to work in-house, said Bill Burns, general manager for Memphis's Custom Data Solutions.

"The market is growing," said Burns. "While it is true companies are outsourcing IT jobs overseas, most of these jobs are of a lower skill set. ... I have open positions right now that need to be filled with the latest and greatest technology skill set. I had to recruit an employee from a government contractor out of Alabama to fill a need in Jackson, Tenn."

CIO magazine reports a survey of IT executives shows 40 percent are hiring people with highly technical skills such as software development, project management, database management and information security. But most small businesses can't afford to hire such folks, and they need a generalist who can help a small business select the right systems and take full advantage of those features.

"They do have a need to have a CIO, but just some of the time," Rothman said.

For example, a law firm client with more than 100 attorneys had not set up a shared calendar system so each person would know what the others are doing and what resources (such as conference rooms) are available, he said.

"If you don't have an IT department and don't have someone in it who is reasonably switched on and tuned in, you don't know about some of these things," Rothman said. "The difference in some of these issues is the difference between things running smoothly and things running not so smoothly."

Rothman wants his business to grow and is considering establishing an office outside his home, but he wants most of his workers to be able to work most of the time at home.

Rothman is specializing in professional-service firms because the principals know what technology can do, but are typically too tied up with their daily workload to set up a smoothly running system.

Cathy Morton, PhD, a clinical psychologist, is such a person.

"My husband gave me his old Palm device some time ago, and it's still sitting on the desk," she said. "I said to Edward, 'Can you take that, set it up properly and give me a tutorial?' He said, 'I can do that.'"

She is also considering expanding her practice with some colleagues and upgrading their information systems simultaneously. "We've just been talking about how to make things easier, how to make things go more quickly, make the most of my time, simplify things, organize things."

Dr. David Weber, a family physician who makes house calls, said Rothman set up a system to synchronize his laptop and main computers and maintains them.

"In May, he went on vacation to see his parents in Europe," Weber said. "The moment he got on the plane, our computer system crashed. When he landed, he got my text message, and using his Palm, he diagnosed that a piece of the router had failed, sent us out to CompUSA, ordered the part for us, told us how to put it in, and configured the whole thing. He completely fixed everything remotely, while on vacation in Europe."

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