

November 17, 2008

Custom software, systems firm collects data, crunches numbers

*Sean Dobbins
Staff writer*

The Rochester Top 100, which annually recognizes the fastest-growing privately held companies in the nine-county region, is sponsored by the Rochester Business Alliance and KPMG.

Here is an interview with James Campbell, president of Viewpoint Systems Inc. in Brighton.



Dave Phillipson of Victor, left, and Stu McFarlane of Spencerport set up a test system at Viewpoint Systems in Brighton for a client in Canada who makes aircraft steering assemblies. The firm specializes in custom systems integration.

Tell me a little bit about the company's history.

The partners at Viewpoint Systems all worked together before at a previous company called Asyst Software, and that company was purchased by Keithley Instruments. Subsequently, they asked us to reorganize and merge with another company they purchased in Massachusetts. A good number of us decided not to go, so we started Viewpoint back in 1992.

We've been doing custom systems integration work since that time, and as you might imagine, our first customer when we started Viewpoint was Keithley Instruments, helping with their transition. But we picked up a number of jobs subsequent to that as a service organization, and we've grown since then.

Over the years we expanded both geographically as well as capability-wise. We're now working mainly in upstate New York, but we're also working everywhere from New England, Pennsylvania, Ohio, New Jersey, as well as the Toronto area.

In layman's terms, what's "custom systems integration"?

Systems integration is a very generic term. It applies to people who are putting in home theaters as well as IT networking systems. But our system integration work is for test

and measurement. So our systems enable people to collect measurements on products for the purpose of being able to analyze it for its performance.

So in a scenario where you're doing new product development, what we're typically being asked to do is help collect data to decide whether Design A is better than Design B.

Also, about a year and a half ago, we started a division called Aperio. As you can imagine, all the measurements generate lots of data. The Aperio side analyzes the data. It also would potentially be an avenue for companies to learn about us, and then go backwards: "So you can analyze the data, but can you help us collect it?" Yes! Of course we can. So there's some good synergy between those two divisions.

What makes Viewpoint Systems stand out from the competition?

We are a select partner of National Instruments, which means we're in the top 3 percent of their systems integrators, so we are well-known and we have a lot of expertise with National Instruments' products, and we need to be continually certifying ourselves in their products in order to maintain that rating.

Also, the Control Systems Integrator Association, which I'm on the executive council for, they have a best practices and benchmarks booklet. They will go in and audit companies and they act sort of like ISO certification, only for system integration companies. That audit happens once every three years and we've gone through it twice.

So people recognize that with the CSIA certification, as well as being a National Instruments partner, we're staying on top of our game. Companies who want a partner who has the technical depth as well as the project management depth and the long history, they would come to us. We offer stability, solutions and a comfort level to our customers.

How's the current economy affecting you?

At this moment, it hasn't really affected our business at all. A lot of the doom and gloom in the economy is pretty heavily focused on financial markets, housing, automotive and, to some degree, oil — and we don't work in those industries to a large extent.

Most of the companies we deal with nowadays are military, aerospace and medical devices. People continue to get sick, and health care and our medical devices are very important. And as of today, the military hasn't really been affected yet, but we'll see.

What are your plans for the future of the company?

We want to continue to grow with Aperio, and we also have plans to continue to grow geographically on our systems integration side. We actually started that already; we have five people in Buffalo and a couple people in Syracuse.

So we want to continue to push out geographically. Upstate New York is the prime focus now, but with Buffalo we've kind of hit the western edge, so we're starting to look at Ohio and Pittsburgh. On the east side, Albany is a place where we do a fair amount of work, and Canada is another area we're looking at pretty seriously.

How do you spend time away from work?

I do a lot of outdoor activities. I'm not necessarily a competitive guy in that I don't run races, but I like hiking. I like cycling. I like running. I like cross-country skiing, all that stuff.

What's your favorite movie from the past year?

Iron Man. That was great. I like sci-fi movies.

SDOBBIN@DemocratandChronicle.com

Additional Facts

VIEWPOINT SYSTEMS INC. No. 68

Viewpoint Systems Inc.: Custom computer software and systems designer, specializing in measurement and control applications.

Year founded: 1992.

Location: 800 W. Metro Park, Brighton.

Executives: James Campbell, president, 54, of Perinton; Dave Smith, CEO of Viewpoint Data Management; Fred Genett, vice president; Stu McFarlane, vice president.

Employees: 42.

Web: www.viewpointusa.com.