

Entrepreneur profile

Michael Price Founder and CEO, MPANetworks.



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Intern-
San Francisco Business Times
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What it does: IT service provider.

HQ: Belmont, with most clients in San Francisco.

2013 projected revenue: \$2.5 million.

Employees: 15.

Founded: 1983.

Source of startup capital: Self-funded.

Background: I've been involved with computers and gadgets since early on. My first job was as a coder, but I couldn't talk to people, so it got boring. So I started MPA networks back in 1983 — back when the PC hard drive came out.

Age: 55.

Residence: Menlo Park.

Web site: MPA.com

Big Picture

How's business: Really good. The best thing is we have steady long-term clients. Some of them have been with us for 20 years. That makes for good business. The other reason is that we have steady long-term employees.

Biggest challenge for your business: The huge danger is in new viruses that have appeared and are rapidly growing. There are nasty ones that can take your company down. We've developed an approach for our clients to fight back.

What's going to change at your company in the next year: We are accepting new clients for the first time in about 10 years. With the kind of business we're in, there's a massive amount of change.

Are you hiring: We're hiring network engineers, people who are good with computers and who care about clients.

Business Moves

Reason for starting business: The first serious personal computer came out — the IBM PC that would work for business. I saw it as an opportunity, and it was. We've been profitable every year for three decades.

Most difficult part of decision: I think it was foregoing a steady paycheck.

Biggest misconception: That I would work less. If you want to work 40 hours a week, starting a business won't work.

Biggest business strength: The fact that we have the most experienced and friendly team in the Bay Area. They focus on productivity.

Biggest business weakness: Low-margins. It's good for clients, because they get high value, but in Northern California with large boom-bust cycles, it's hard to manage.

Biggest risk: The biggest risk is working with a client who is not a good fit — for example, a client who is a penny wise and a pound foolish. They're not interested in productivity.

Smartest move: Hiring well and joining a CEO alliance.

Biggest worry: The Northern California boom and bust cycle — when there's a boom, rents go up and things are expensive. In a bust, clients want to cut back. We like a steady economy.

What do you wish you had known from Day 1: When I started, everybody assumed the best way to apply service was on an hourly billing basis. Now I know the best is the insurance policy-style agreement.

Work Routine

Most challenging task: Hiring is the most rewarding when it's done well.

Favorite task: Serving clients.

Biggest frustration: It's a sad waste of resources when a company gives employees poor tools to use. You can do a lot more work when you have good technology, so that's frustrating for us.

Source of support in a business crisis: Our wonderful team.

Dreams

Key goal yet to achieve: Have a patent granted for our technology care insurance. We've filed patents and haven't been granted for that yet.

Five-year plan: Our plan is to grow the business and help more people.

Inducement to sell: I think if we ever do "sell" it, it would be to the employees.

Personals

Most-admired entrepreneur: Bill Gates.

Favorite pastimes: Winemaking, Mayan archaeology, photography.

Favorite book: The first 100 pages of "Islands in the Stream."

Favorite film: "L'Avventura."

Favorite restaurant: Coqueta.

Favorite music: Bossa Nova, Los Lobos.

Car: Jaguar.



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