

32-year-old Communication Co. going strong

By **GENE STOWE**
Tribune Correspondent

The 32-year-old Communication Co. of South Bend has enjoyed rapid growth since employees Dan Schmidendorff and Barry Schleiger bought the company in 2006. Sales nearly doubled last year and are on track for a strong increase this year.

The growth comes from both return customers and new customers, says Schmidendorff, who credits the long-experienced sales and engineering staffs with the success.

"We let the people do what they know how to do," he says. "We definitely have great relationships with existing clients, but we've also increased that tremendously in the last couple of years as well. We've got a lot of return business, and we've increased our customer base."

Communication Co., also known as South Bend Communications, provides communications equipment, including intercoms, sound systems and telephone and voice

mail systems, to health care providers, universities and colleges, other educational institutions, manufacturers and other businesses.

"We've pretty much focused on life safety, security and communications," Schmidendorff says.

Tibor Folding and Vern McCain started the company in 1976 as a distributor for Illinois-based Rauland Borg that specialized in communications equipment for the school market. Folding retired in late 2006 and McCain became head of the contractor sales department.

The Communication Co.'s offerings expanded as Rauland increased its product lines over the years, including nurse call equipment, jail control and intercom systems.

Communication Co. also partnered with Siemens, manufacturer of fire alarms and similar equipment. They are an NEC telephone system dealer, along with various card access and closed circuit TV manufacturers.



Photo provided

Communication Co. officials are pictured at the time Dan Schmidendorff and Barry Schleiger bought the South Bend company in 2006. Shown from left are Schmidendorff, president; Barry Schleiger, vice president of operations; Vern McCain, vice president (now retired); and Tibor Folding, previous owner.

See **STRONG/11**

A real person at Absolute Communication answers these calls

By **GENE STOWE**
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In a world of leave-a-message voice mail, Absolute Communication Center Inc. offers live operators 24/7 to help clients, especially small businesses, make sure they don't miss customers' calls.

"We've got live operators that are connected to multiple telephone lines," says owner Tom Cook. "We purchase 100 numbers at a time. We give them a phone number. They use call forwarding when they're not in their office."

The forwarded phone number

activates the system to show the operator necessary information about the customer.

"It comes up on a computer system with all their information," he says. "The live operator can take a message," then call or fax information to the client as desired. "We do alphanumeric paging for people who still have pagers."

The service means customers will always have a chance to be in touch with clients' businesses.

"It works great for small businesses that can't afford to have someone answer the phone all the time," Cook says. "A lot of people

don't leave messages. You depend on that to get a customer.

"We have a lot of plumbers, heating and air conditioning people. We do quite a bit in the medical field, too."

Operators, including many long-time employees, can screen the calls, alerting customers in emergencies and holding others for the ordinary business day.

"There's a lot of filtering," he says. "It depends on what the client wants to have done."

Absolute Communication also provides alarm monitoring and residential service.

"Along with doing the messaging, we can answer for alarm systems," Cook says. "We've got the personnel here 24/7. We notify the proper authorities and call the contact list the customer has provided."

Cook started an alarm business, T.C. Security Co. Inc., 27 years ago and opened Absolute Communication five or six years ago to support TC Security and add more services. "We used different monitoring services," he says. "Eventually, we just started our own."

By that time, the industry, once

dependent on handwritten, pigeonholed notes, had become automated. Absolute Communication, which has 12 employees, has backup generators to guarantee that the service is uninterrupted.

"There's always two or three operators on, depending on the call volume," he says. "Certain holidays are really busy," such as Christmas Eve when workers leave early and forward the phone calls.

For more information on Absolute Communication Center Inc. call (574) 282-4920 or see the company's Web site at www.absolutececi.com.

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