

## A born builder

How Thomas E. Hoshko grows companies by focusing on customer needs

By Lindsey Grant

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Starting a company comes with many challenges — you have to find the money to finance it, employees to help run it and customers to support it.

But for Thomas E. Hoshko, that is where the fun is.

“I’ve always been more of a builder versus a maintenance person,” says Hoshko, who has founded two companies and led multiple others to rapid growth. “When a company gets to the point where it is time to be more in a maintenance mode versus growth and building, then it is time for me to move on.”

Hoshko’s latest undertaking is The Experts, a technology solutions and staffing company that he took over in 2002. As with his previous endeavors, Hoshko is growing The Experts at a rapid pace, from just under \$1 million in 2002 to around \$12 million in 2005. Hoshko estimates that The Experts will surpass \$20 million in 2006.

*Smart Business* spoke with Hoshko, CEO and president of The Experts, about how he grows businesses and caters to his clients’ needs.

### **What strategies have you used to grow companies?**

I hire the proven producers. We pay for performance and have good customer relationships. A lot of the [same] customers I have had throughout the years, regardless of which company I am with. I more or less work with the individual.

We don’t just pay on sales. For our branches, we pay on EBIT — earnings before interest and taxes. We pay them for profit and growth. That gives them some incentive.

We have strong customer relationships. We basically find strong demand and then deliver what we promise. You have to change with the technology and with your customers if you are customer-driven. For example Y2K was a big thing in 2000, but now it’s more things like Six Sigma, Sarbanes-Oxley and the defense niche.

If you are thinking about going public or you are thinking about value or selling or Wall Street, you want to be in something that has strong demand that you can forecast out for the next four or five years.

## **How do you plan to achieve your goal of being the most customer service-oriented company in the industry?**

What we try to do is become a business partner with all of our customers. We get to know their business and not just their technology and plans for technology

When we provide technology experts, whether it's network people or database people or even subject matter experts, they will know (the client's) business as well as the technology environment. For example, you're not going to take a guy out of the manufacturing environment and put him in a bank. It is important that people know and understand the business and the applications, as well as the technology.

We listen to what they need and then we deliver solutions to solve their problems. Customer service consists of developing a relationship over time, becoming a true business partner, listening to customer needs and obviously delivering. If you deliver, they are going to continue to work with you.

## **How do you find out what your customers want and need?**

We go out and meet with our customers on a weekly basis to get to know them. We are probably one of the few companies that do guaranteed performance. For example, if we put somebody in, and it may not be that technically they can't do it but it may be their personality, we will replace that person at no cost.

What we usually do is follow up with a customer on a regular basis, a monthly basis certainly, but especially the first week or two. We want to make sure that not only is the person technically qualified but meets the personality of the team he is working with and gets along with the managers.

## **How do you train your employees to excel in customer service?**

We have some formal training that we have developed from all of the companies that we have worked for. There is still nobody in the industry that is doing everything 100 percent right. But each company seems to be doing something better than others, whether it's sales, recruiting, marketing or even back office systems.

Not only do we try to hire the best, we take the best practices from other companies and put together our own combination of on-the-job training and formal training.

Occasionally, we will hire people who don't have experience but seem to have the right attitude and are motivated. More than that, we hire the proven producers from the industry.

One of the things that I've learned over the years is you have to hire slow and fire fast. I've always told people that I don't fire people, they pretty much fire themselves. You can't teach certain things like motivation or drive. That's the only thing that I have seen hold people back in this industry. And the hard work.

It is a tough business, but it can also be a very rewarding business.

HOW TO REACH: The Experts, 800-336-8359 or [www.expertsit.com](http://www.expertsit.com).