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Staying Flexible Tech company finds niche serving gymnastic schools

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As a college gymnast, Mark Mahoney practiced his share of balancing acts.

Today, as one of the entrepreneurs behind Jackrabbit Technologies, he's helping gymnastic schools, dance studios and other class-based businesses balance enrollment and billing with his proprietary software.

Mahoney and his business partner Mike Carper founded Charlotte-based Jackrabbit Technologies Inc. after developing a Web-based software program for schools and studios. The program helps clients manage enrollment, schedules and billing. Tapping into an underserved niche - and using the Internet for everything from marketing to customer support - paved the way for their business to blossom in four years. Jackrabbit has more than 1,000 clients in eight countries. Revenue has at least doubled every year since the company launched.

Growth is expected to continue in 2009 after Kindermusik, a music school franchise with more than 5,000 educators, recently agreed to partner with Jackrabbit.

"It went from something that we thought could supplement our income to something that was our entire income and on up from there," says Carper.

After his days as a college gymnast at the University of Georgia, Mahoney put his computer science degree to work. He wrote a DOS-based software program in the 1980s for gymnastics schools.

"I wanted to write a new system and gymnastics is all I know," Mahoney says about the niche.

QUICKINFO

JACKRABBIT TECHNOLOGIES INC.

Business: Company develops and maintains Web-based software for class-based businesses, including dance studios and gymnastics schools.

Principals: Mark Mahoney and Mike Carper

Founded: 2005

Employees: Seven

Web: www.JackrabbitTech.com



The Tea House in Cornelius often serves as the conference room for Mark Mahoney (left) and Mike Carper since they actually operate Jackrabbit Technologies from their homes.

Mahoney enlisted Carper, an IT specialist to help him develop the program. Their work resulted in a program completely based online. Jackrabbit clients manage business operations online, students can enroll and pay bills at a Web site, and Jackrabbit's staff can demo, support and monitor the business from any Internet connection.

The company's revenue source is a monthly membership fee, about \$110 on average per month.

Michele Edwards uses the Jackrabbit program at her Huntersville dance studio, Rhythm in Effect. The Jackrabbit technology "has given me back family time without feeling like I'm neglecting my business," she says.

Jackrabbit's lack of a central office emphasizes the online capability of its software. Principals Mahoney and Carper work from home occasionally meet each other with laptops in tow at area coffee shops. Their support staff is comprised mainly of stay-at-home moms with computer training who respond to customer needs via Blackberry or home computer.

The company's marketing strategies also focus online. To make the software more appealing and easier to find, Jackrabbit enlisted Google Adwords and secured different Web sites tailored to the different schools they serve: JackrabbitDance.com, JackrabbitMusic.com, JackrabbitSwim.com and several others.

Another interesting note: Mahoney and Carper built the company debt-free by reinvesting profits the first two years. They haven't sought outside funding and don't anticipate selling the company.

"This is what I want to do," Mahoney says. "If I'm not in this business, I'll be retired."



JACKRABBIT
CLASS

LESSON LEARNED:

Jackrabbit Technologies developed software for an underserved niche and used the Internet to grow the business.