

# Internet Services Firm Secures Success With Not-So 'Secret Weapon'

## SMALL BIZ: People Are Playing Big Part At Data Center Facilities

By EMMET PIERCE

The nation has been locked in a damaging recession for several years, but **American Internet Services** has managed to be a profitable company by concentrating on customer services, says Chief Executive Officer **Tim Caulfield**.



Tim Caulfield

"We are in a very high-tech space," he explained. "Our product is very complex, but at the end of the day we are a service business. What that means is it is a people-based relationship business. It is about one-on-one relationships. Ultimately, it is about the service and the experience you have."

Based in Kearny Mesa, the company has 75 local employees. It provides secure, high-tech data centers for businesses that need to be connected to the Internet.

"We provide a location for customers who take their technology infrastructure and put it in our facilities," Caulfield explained. "It allows just about everybody who needs an Internet presence to connect to the Internet at a centralized point. Data centers are extremely expensive to build and to operate."

Building a data center costs about \$1,000 a square foot, he explained. It also requires specialized skills to operate the facility. "Most companies these days decide 'Rather than doing this ourselves, let's go to a place that provides that space

for us,'" he said.

### Mix of Dedicated Spaces

At the data center facilities, each client occupies its own dedicated space. The centers offer a mixture of spaces, including cabinets, cages and private suites.

"We are basically going to take a cage, 7-foot-by-8-foot with a wall around it, and you can put your rack of equipment in that space," Caulfield said. "It is a secured environment. You are in a data center that is always connected to the Internet."

Offering a great product isn't enough to be successful during an economic downturn, he added. You have to make sure that the changing needs of customers are met. All successful companies are in the business of creating trust.

"One of the reasons we have retained and grown our customers, even in the past few years, is making sure we are providing fantastic customer service," he said. "You want to be open and honest. Transparency is key. People are putting very expensive infrastructure in our facilities. The way we operate these facilities has to be an open book. We can't be secretive. Many of our customers are knowledgeable. Many have run facilities like this themselves. They know what it takes to do this successfully. Customers end up trusting you and trust is a big piece of what we sell."

### Craig MacKinder,

a customer of AIS for about four years, owns **Total Tech Resource Corp.**, an information technology consulting company based in the Scripps Ranch area.

"I do business with other co-location providers," he said.



Craig MacKinder



Photo courtesy of American Internet Services

Kearny Mesa-based American Internet Services provides secure, high-tech data centers for businesses that need to be connected to the Internet.

"What sets AIS apart from other vendors is the people who work there. They take the time to understand your specific business's technology needs, rather than try to do a one-size-fits-all service. It is a powerful combination of winning elements for anyone in the technology business."

### A Decade of Loyalty

**John Ewart** is a partner in **Mind-Centric Inc.**, a managed hosting company with offices in Mission Valley and Fallbrook.

"We are co-located at AIS," he said. "We have been with the core team there for about 10 years. It's a great company. They have an awesome network. The staff there works with you and understands your needs. They are



John Ewart

very accommodating."

With clients worldwide, American Internet Services has seven co-location facilities in California and Arizona. Caulfield says the company has purchased state-of-the-art equipment and technology in order to offer reliability and adequate bandwidth. The firm describes its facilities as "technology fortresses" because of their security and reliability.

Caulfield, an industry veteran, said company revenue last year was approximately \$32 million. He noted that the firm has a wide range of customers, including Fortune 500 businesses and startups.

"I have been in the industry for over 10 years," Caulfield said. "This sector is extremely hot right now. You don't have to convince customers why they need to buy it. We believe we can grow substantially over the next five to seven years."

Emmet Pierce is a freelance writer for the *San Diego Business Journal*.

## EXECUTIVE PROFILE | DeLinda Forsythe

DeLinda Forsythe is president of **Innovative Commercial Environments**, a full-service contract furniture dealership with two showrooms located in San Diego County.

The company provides furniture and interior solutions for medical, educational, government, hospitality and commercial clients. Recent projects include San Diego State University, Cal State San Marcos, Thomas Jefferson School of Law, **Clark Construction Group LLC**, **Solar Turbines Inc.** and **Epsilon Systems Solutions Inc.** Innovative Commercial Environments focuses on furniture solutions that maintain budget constraints while providing an environment that is integral with the architectural features of the space.

### BUSINESS PHILOSOPHY

**Essential business philosophy:** Service, fast, accurate service.

**Best way to keep a competitive edge:** Let creativity be your guide.

**Guiding principles:** Be receptive to new ideas, product solutions and my staff's resolutions. Every project is unique.

**Yardsticks of success:** If my family and employees respect me.

**Goals yet to be achieved:** Mentoring my staff to reach their goals — only time will tell.

### JUDGMENT CALLS

**Best business decision:** Starting my company.

**Worst business decision:** Not having faith in myself to start it sooner.

**Toughest business decision:** Employee downsizing.

**Biggest missed opportunity:** A missed opportunity or failure is highly positive; it means you are trying.

**Mentor:** **Pat O'Day** of **O'Day Consultants**, client and friend. Pat insisted I start my company and has provided me with advice all along the way.

**Word that describes you:** Energetic.

### TRUE CONFESSIONS

**What you like best about your job:** Creating beautiful interior environments that my clients love; they are my best advertising.

**What you like least about your job:** Very long hours.

**Pet peeves:** Whiners, especially when it is me.

**Most important lesson learned:** It's not about my vision, listen to what the client wants first.

**Person most interested in meeting:** Warren Buffett.

**Three greatest passions:** Family, faith and patriotism.

**First choice for a new career:** Philanthropist.



### PREDILECTIONS

**Favorite quote:** "Fortune favors the brave."

**Most influential book:** **Tom Brokaw's** "The Greatest Generation" is excellent. It should be required reading in our schools.

**Favorite status symbol:** My family, it's amazing to have kids who are your best friends.

**Favorite restaurant:** My kitchen, but I

### RESUME

**Name:** DeLinda Forsythe.

**Company:** Innovative Commercial Environments, dba ICE.

**Title:** President.

**Revenue — 2010:** \$3.9 million.

**Revenue — 2009:** \$2.4 million.

**No. of employees:** Six.

**Year founded:** 2006.

**Education:** Bachelor of Fine Arts, UC Irvine, 1983.

**Birthplace:** Mount Clemens, Mich.

**Age:** 53.

**Current residence:** Encinitas.

**Family:** Husband, **Tom**; son, **Alex Orona**, daughter and son-in-law through marriage, **Amy** and **Gary**.

have not been there for a while.

**Favorite place for business meetings:** The University Club Atop Symphony Towers.

**Favorite vacation spot:** Kauai, Hawaii, but any place where I am with my husband.

**Favorite way to spend time:** Hiking Mount San Jacinto.

— Steve Adamek