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ANOTHER IN A SERIES OF PROFILES OF LEXINGTON'S OUTSTANDING ENTREPRENEURS

CGS Builds Business on Breaking News Displays

By Gina Greathouse and Dean Harvey

If you read those crawling news ticker updates that frequently run across the lower third of your television screen, chances are very good that the computerized technology that generates those messages — and even some of the message content itself — originated right here in Lexington.

CGS Infographics Automation, Inc., the local firm responsible for much of that news ticker programming, began in May 1996 as a three-way partnership formed by Gene Hamm, Bryan Mullins and Chas Callaway.

Ten years ago, both Hamm and Callaway were working at the local CBS affiliate station, WKYT-TV.

"Chas had this knack for writing custom ticker software for broadcast usage," said Hamm, a UK business/marketing grad. "Together we realized that placing a sponsor's logo within the context of the 'crawl' would result in both a revenue-generating tool for the station and a means by which more breaking news could be put on the air without interrupting the scheduled programming."

Research proved what the two suspected: there was a void in the broadcast industry for this niche application. They invited Hamm's North Hardin High School friend, engineer Bryan Mullins, who had since earned mechanical engineering and MBA degrees from Vanderbilt, to help them form a start-up company. The resulting entrepreneurial venture was named CGS Automation.

Intensive cold-calling on commercial TV stations across the country began and brought them their first substantial client, KCBS in Los Angeles, the second largest media market in the country. Today the CGS team has licensed its software systems nationwide, with its tickers reaching over 62 million households.

Currently CGS is supplying display systems to such clients as the Oxygen Network, TECHTV, Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines, Direct TV's NFL "Red Zone," Cox Sports and Fox News. They have expanded their portfolio of offerings to include large outdoor LED screens, typified by their new installation in Chicago, with an information display that crawls around the NBC affiliate station's Michigan Avenue studio exterior. Locally CGS has supplied suction display systems for both the Keeneland and Fasig-Tipton sales.

According to Mullins, the trio's latest joint venture, FUEL VIEW, utilizes digital signage at various gas stations nationwide. "We put LCD monitors over gas pumps and supply the video content that includes commercial advertising, news, weather, and sports," he explained. Interested in seeing this technology in action? Then fill up your tank at Carey Shell on Nicholasville Road South, next to the Toyota dealership.

And what are the future plans for this techno-trio? "We're utilizing the same approach as Microsoft Office by branding our entire suite of products. Our NEWSCHIEF package includes current headlines, weather forecasts, conditions, alerts, sports scores, stocks of local interest, traffic and even text messaging, as well as phone and web automation for news of school closings and local high school sports scores," Callaway explained.

Recognizing that industry-wide visibility is essential to continued success, the CGS team annually hosts exhibits at major broadcasting trade shows. Like so many other Lexington-based entrepreneurial businesses we've profiled in this series, these men also know the value of satisfied customers. Hamm noted, "The majority of our leads come through word-

of-mouth recommendations. Many of our stations are part of broadcasting conglomerates, and when we do a good job with one, the word spreads."

Stay tuned for more from CGS, and keep your eye on those TV news crawls. Chances are very good that they're being run on home-grown systems!



Gina Greathouse of Commerce Lexington and Dean Harvey of UK's Innovation and Commercialization Center collaborate as members of the Bluegrass Business Development Partnership to promote and support new and existing businesses in Central Kentucky. Contact them at (859)225-5005.

> If you know of other entrepreneurial, e-type ventures in the Lexington area that deserve to be featured in this series, please email Gina Greathouse at ggreathouse@commercelexington.com.