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Being there

Videré's 'three amigos' combine video, audio, web conferencing and expertise

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BRAINTREE — Sometimes a fat Rolodex can be more important than a fat wallet in getting a new company off the ground. Just ask William Benoit, Steve Cogliano and Todd Luttinger, founders of Videré Conferencing Inc. of Braintree.

In 2002, the three, who have more than 30 years of experience among them in the conferencing industry, contributed \$50,000 apiece and their Rolodexes to start Videré. In six months they had a dozen clients. By the end of the first year, they had 30 clients, six employees and \$1 million in revenue. More impressive, they had paid themselves back and were drawing paychecks.

Coming up on two years, they have 60 customers, eight employees and projected 2003 revenue of more than \$3 million.

And they have done it in a crowded marketplace. Videoconferencing has been around for nearly 20 years, although the technology has never quite caught on as expected. But as companies continue to trim their travel budgets, analysts say that is expected to change. Duxbury-based Wainhouse Research LLC predicts the global conferencing market will grow 22 percent to \$9.8 billion by 2006, for example.

Benoit, Cogliano and Luttinger — the “three amigos,” as they call themselves — knew the market was there: They had been working and selling for some of the biggest players in the conferencing industry. By 2000, however, they all came in from the field, working for different companies.

“We remained friends and in contact,” Luttinger says. “We had a couple of timely meetings at Starbucks and started talking about the opportunities for conferencing post-9/11. Not just videoconferencing, but conferencing in general.”

At the same time, they were all anxious to get off the road and spend more time with their families. They started talking about forming their own conferencing company, one that would provide video, audio and web conferencing products.

“There’s been a real shift to resellers, but they’re geared to ‘here’s the box, here’s the instructions,’” Luttinger says. “There’s very little hand-holding and customer care. I think that’s what made the three of us so successful at our previous companies. We were the proverbial Avis: We tried harder.”

Luttinger, Videré’s president; Benoit, its CFO and treasurer; and Cogliano, its vice president of operations, debated about starting their business over one of their garages, but ultimately decided that if they wanted to go after legitimate customers, they needed to look legitimate themselves. They took advantage of the slumping real estate market to sublet 1,500 square feet of space for 22 months.



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“We figured that was enough time to either make it or blow it up,” Luttinger says.

They obviously made it and will move into 3,000 square feet in November. They also had to invest in demonstration equipment and hire a support person to work with Cogliano.

Each of the three founders was also prepared not to take a salary for two years. By the fourth quarter of the first year, however, they had not only paid themselves back but were drawing paychecks.

Part of their early strategy was to go after service contracts at some of their old contacts.

Ropes & Gray LLP, one of Boston’s largest law firms with more than 600 lawyers and satellite offices in New York, San Francisco and Washington, D.C., has been using videoconferencing since the mid-1990s.

Alan Beagan, the law firm’s director of operations, says the technology enables the firm to communicate more effectively across departments and offices. “Somewhat at the drop of a hat, we can get a few people together and have a face-to-face meeting. A visual meeting is always more meaningful.”

He says the firm hired Videré because “not only do they understand the technology, but most importantly, they understand the best practices around the technology.”

“They’ve done a lot of training (sessions) for us, right down to nuts and bolts like the best way to create PowerPoint slides so they will have a more effective visual presentation during a video conference,” Beagan says.

Greg MacArthur, president of Viewpoint 2000 in Danvers, has followed the videoconferencing industry since its inception 18 years ago. He believes the talents of Videré’s three founders have made the difference in this competitive marketplace.

“They brought their own expertise, and more importantly, their own customer base,” MacArthur says.