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A Fast-Growing Small Business: Insight Resource Group of Orinda

By Sophie Braccini



Scott Mollahan with displays created by IRG for a winery. Photo Sophie Braccini

When Inc. magazine ranked the 2010 top growing companies in the United States, Orinda's Insight Resource Group (IRG) ranked 82nd nationally with a 2,917% growth over the last three years - within its industry, business products and services, IRG ranks 7th in the country. Scott Mollahan, who founded the company with his wife Valerie, was both surprised and validated. "We are in our growing phase," he says, "so it is normal that we'd be growing so fast." The humble entrepreneur, who started his promotional display and printing company four years ago, operates in a very competitive field. In order to thrive, IRG had to come with a very solid offer, but also provide unique value-added services that contribute to its customers' bottom lines.

Mollahan previously worked for Applied Graphics, where he specialized in selling in the beverage industry and learned about the printing of marketing material, packaging and gifts-with-purchase promotions. When Applied Graphics was sold, the Mollahans launched IRG in the city where they've lived since 1998. "I was tired of the San Raphael commute," he says, "I wanted to work close to home and so do our employees." The proximity to home makes things easier for the Mollahans, who have four children between the ages of five and eleven.

Building relationships has been at the heart of the Mollahans' success from the start. "A large part of our business is 'point of sale' (POS) in-store retail displays and custom racks that attract customers' attention in stores or restaurants," explains Mollahan. "Some of them are standard and just need to have the right message printed on, but many others are custom-made. So trusting high quality and cost effective manufacturers is key." For more than 10 years now Mollahan has been working with a Chinese company with whom he converses through Skype at least twice a week. "We work with manufacturers in the United States and Mexico as well," says

Mollahan, "one of our competitive advantages is that we deliver quality, cost effective products."

Another of IRG's assets is the integration of the services they provide. When a customer has an idea for a campaign, IRG's team can develop the concept and bring it to reality, using different media such as metal, wood, fabric, and paper. "We do not own large printing equipment," says Mollahan, "that makes us flexible; we don't have to push printed paper." For example, when Sonoma winery Chateau St. Jean prepared the promotion of its Dream Wedding Giveaway sweepstakes that included a style consultation with a Martha Stewart Weddings magazine expert, IRG created a custom display that looked like a small kitchen island.

Mollahan has also been working on an automated production management system that aggregates orders coming from different clients and allows the company to reduce its price. "In our industry, people prepare their campaigns months in advance," says Mollahan. "If someone orders a specific rack at one time we'll quote him a price that will be his maximum. As others purchase similar products, the orders will be consolidated and the price will go down for everyone."

Mollahan is starting to give to his biggest customers the software he developed so they can use it to track the individual performance of the displays they've acquired. "It is important for us to provide extra value to our clients," says the entrepreneur. By the same token, IRG organized a seminar on integrated marketing with Affinitive, a firm specialized in social media marketing for the beverage industry. "We help them integrate the different aspects of marketing," says Mollahan, "our displays can include an LCD screen with a video, printed text encourage the customers to 'friend' our clients on their Facebook page, and we will produce the gifts our clients will give out as part of their word of mouth campaigns."

Today, more than 50% of IRG business is in the beverage industry, but the company is diversifying and new clients include Bay Area businesses such as Leap Frog, Bay Alarm and D|A Financial Group.

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