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Firm ready for life outside IRCC incubator

BYLINE: BILL CHURCH BJ contributor

Karen Schreiner has lost another tenant. She couldn't be happier. Capture Information Services Group, a market research and data collection firm, has grown too big for its space in the Indian River Community College High-Tech Business Incubator and has moved out, which is exactly how it's supposed to work.

Schreiner is the director of the IRCC incubator on SE Central Parkway just off U.S. 1 in Stuart. The incubator provides furnished office suites at competitive lease rates, network computers and complimentary high speed Internet access, use of shared business equipment and facilities, business advice and networking opportunities.

Schreiner said three years is the average stay for a business at the incubator, but Capture ISG made the leap in just 20 months.

FIRM'S BRAINCHILD

The firm is the brainchild of Stuart Marion, 49, who shares ownership with his business partner and wife, Maureen Hamilton. He started the business in Warwick, R.I., in 1991 after getting caught in a layoff at Fidelity Investments, where he was director of a brokerage account. In all, Marion spent 12 years in the financial services industry with stints at Bank of New York and Chemical Bank of New York, in addition to Fidelity.

Marion envisioned Capture ISG as a management consulting firm specializing in service quality programs and call centers. But in 1994, at the request of a client, Marion added a market research program using his existing infrastructure.

Marion's wife also joined the firm in 1994 from her financial services career. Their core of part time employees grew to 10 to 15 workers.

Two years ago, Marion and Hamilton moved to this area to be near his ill mother, now deceased, and his sisters.

Marion heard about the incubator from another satisfied tenant and moved most operations there in April 2005 while scaling back in Rhode Island. He credits Jack Burns, who was then IRCC's small business development center consultant, with helping him learn the local market.

"Coming from a totally different market, this was critical to getting us off on the right foot," Marion said.

He and Hamilton started marketing down here, joined the area chambers of commerce and human resources organizations, and started getting busier through recommendations and word-of mouth. Soon, local clients were added to Capture ISG's other clients around the United States, and the firm's space at the incubator grew from one office suite to four.

"Our hard work started to pay off," Marion said.

Market research continues to be a major offering for Capture ISG. The firm uses computer-aided telephone interviewing, which guides interviewers through each conversation. The firm has also done political polling, surveys of topical issues and member retention surveys for organizations.

THE CLIENTS

With the firm's managers possessing a strong background in financial services, it's no surprise that banks are the largest client segment, along with insurance companies, brokerages and mutual funds. Capture ISG provides market research and assessments of customer service to banks.

The company's client list also includes public relations firms, management consultants, hospitality businesses, service industries and a greeting card company.

Since 2002, Capture ISG's largest client has been Tennessee-based The Work Institute, which calls itself a human capital intelligence firm. It helps companies create better workplaces and become better employers. After serving as an outside vendor to The Work Institute, Marion became an employee three years ago as director of call center research services.

In this role, Marion and Capture ISG conduct telephone interviews to gauge the satisfaction of present employees and to provide exit interviews of former employees. They will soon provide so-called "on-boarding" interviews to ask new employees their impressions of the recruiting and orientation process.

For The Work Institute, Capture ISG extensively study other companies' call center operations. Capture ISG personnel call as customers to evaluate how they are treated by other operators. They evaluate how operators answer the phone, put people on hold, how they transfer calls, their product knowledge, their selling and cross-selling skills, and how well they tell the customer when to expect resolution or product arrival.

Marion manages all call center operations for the facilities in Stuart, another in New York and possibly a third to be added next year in Tennessee or Wisconsin.

PRAISES SUNG

Local customers sing the praises of Capture ISG. Riverside National Bank asked for a survey of local customers and non-customers to spot trends.

"Capture ISG was able to take the nuances of our research request and produce a product customized to our market," said Scott Williams, Riverside's senior vice president of marketing. "They were able to do the analysis and come back with clear and concise results."

Executive Director Linda Cox of the St. Lucie Chamber of Commerce called upon Capture ISG for a membership survey.

"We had a marvelous experience with the work Stuart and Maureen did for us," Cox said. "They provided us great information we were never able to gather on our own. And, they're both very hard workers, committed to our community."

With no more room to expand from its 600 square feet at the incubator, Capture ISG has moved down the street to the corner of Kanner Highway. Marion and Hamilton now have 850 square feet with options to expand.

"Being at the incubator gave us scalability and the opportunity to expand, and we shared business and friendship with the other tenants," Marion said. "We plan to maintain those relationships even though we've moved."

The feeling is mutual, according to Schreiner.

"They were a wonderful client, always willing to work with the other incubator clients," Schreiner said. "They fit into the family."

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