

Homegrown Partnerships

Love Triangle

by Lisa Ann Thomson, 9.12.2006 MT

It may be tempting to search for business partners in New York or San Jose. After all, the big guns are usually on the coasts or even beyond, and the world has become so small that there's hardly a difference between working with companies in Los Angeles, China or Peru. Right?

How about maybe? OK, how about dead wrong?

Many Utah companies are discovering there's no place like home when it comes to cultivating partnerships. Some have traversed the landscape of foreign lands — be it New York or India — only to discover that a sensible business fit combined with close proximity makes for a highly effective partnership. The bonus for Utah's economy is that local relationships keep jobs and money in state, and that's good for everyone.

"When we work together with local companies, we're feeding each other's families, keeping our own economy growing and creating jobs for our own community," says Dave Norwood, president of Trusted Network Solutions, a Salt Lake-based value-added reseller.

Many Utah businesses are seizing opportunities within the state, with extremely positive results.

Here are some examples of companies finding success by

keeping it local and some ideas for making it work for your company.

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CR England needed an upgrade. The national trucking company is based in Salt Lake and has about 25 remote offices. They were networked together with a very reliable, very secure, but very slow and expensive frame-relay system. While it had done its job for years, *CR England* had more than outgrown its capabilities.

Paul Erickson, director of technology for *CR England*, went looking for a cheaper, faster solution. He found it through a local VAR, *Trusted Network Solutions (TNS)*, who pointed him to an Israeli company with "local" reps in California. The product was installed and working, but Erickson was not entirely pleased with the results.

"The product was developed by engineers in Israel who are very sharp people. But we had a hard time following the interface and understanding how to navigate their system," Erickson says. He also had a hard time connecting with engineers in an opposite time zone as issues arose.

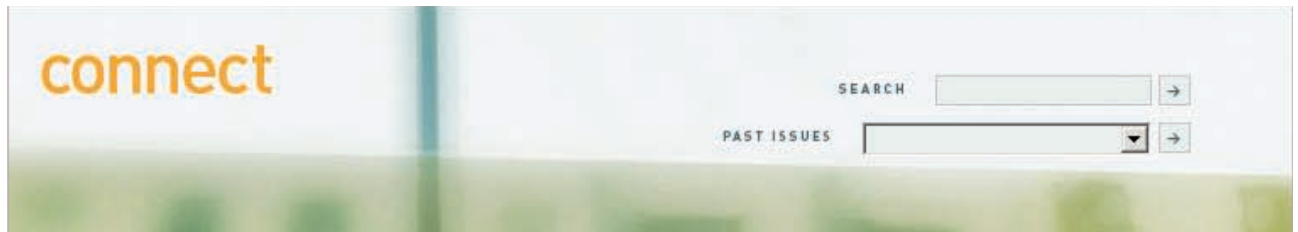
In the meantime, *Trusted Network Solutions* was in discussions with *FatPipe Networks*, a Salt Lake company that provided a solution similar

to what Erickson had already implemented. *TNS*'s Dave Norwood knew *CR England* was struggling, so he posed the problem to *FatPipe*.

"I literally said, 'I got one for you,'" Norwood recalls. "If you can go in there and add so much value that they'll actually tear out a working solution and put yours in, we'll start promoting *FatPipe* to all of our customers.' And lo and behold, they did."

FatPipe not only brought a better solution to the table, but it offered a geographical proximity and a willingness to work closely that ultimately made the sale for Erickson. Having access to its engineers — not just in the same time zone, but also even in the same conference room — has made a dramatic difference in the implementation and maintenance of *FatPipe*'s solution.

"We've had situations where we have brought the *CR England* guys, *TNS* engineers and *FatPipe* engineers together and white boarded solutions to problems," Norwood says. "We had one situation where a *FatPipe* engineer literally walked out of the room, came back 20 minutes later, and had made the enhancement to the product. You can't get that with somebody across an ocean."



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Erickson agrees. "I can't think of a lot of disadvantages to staying local," he says. "It's so important with things that are critical to the company. If that box goes down, all of our connections are down, and that means big money to the company. So if we go down, I'm going to call FatPipe, and if I don't get an answer, I'm going to be at their door. I like that."

For the record, Erickson adds, FatPipe's doors have always been open.

Do It Yourself

If you are feeling inspired to look close to home, following is some advice from companies that have done so successfully.

The first tip: The decision needs to focus on the business first, says Corda's O'Dea. "We really look more at what the partner has to offer rather than the geography of where they are located," O'Dea says. "We're really looking for someone who brings complementary products to our products."

But he adds a qualifier. "The second most important thing is the relationship. You have to manage the relationship actively, and you have to have teams that work well together. The fact that Sharp is close has really accelerated a strong relationship."

Faulconer agrees. "Find the very best business partner for

you. But the fact that a partner is local is a huge benefit in the long run because you can build a stronger relationship, and the likelihood of success is greater," he says.

One of the best ways to seek out local partners is networking. Dexterity's Southard has the benefit of meeting scores of people everyday. Everyone who sits in her salon chairs brings a diverse network of connections, and Southard isn't shy about mining them.

"You have to do the footwork. You have to ask around and network with people you know and people they know and find those connections. And once you start making them, they just keep going and going," Southard says.

FatPipe's President Ragula Bhaskar recommends taking the time to cultivate local relationships. In his experience, local companies tend to offer more attention and better service, so it has proven worth the extra effort to find local companies where possible, even if the relationship needs a little nurturing.

"We make a conscious effort to nurture them," Bhaskar says of his local vendors. "There are some advantages to making them part of your organization so they understand your QA and your processes. With a company in California we would

have no way of getting to that level."

The bottom line: It may not always make sense to stay local, but it definitely makes sense to explore your local options. The advantages to your business and Utah's economy can be compelling.

"Look around your own backyard for opportunities instead of immediately looking to California or somewhere like that," says Norwood. "If the talent or solution is here, it is much better to have someone local rather than someone remote."