

# It's All in The Training

By the time Jerry Brown started SkillPath, he was an old hand at building seminar companies. He had been the marketing director for Fred Pryor Seminars before launching National Seminars Group in 1984.

He met his wife, Denise Dudley, when she was conducting business writing seminars for National.

Brown then sold National, and he and Dudley started SkillPath in 1989 with one desk and one employee. They joined the growing industry trend of offering lower-priced seminars (a typical SkillPath seminar costs \$99), making it affordable for companies to send employees below the upper-management level.

SkillPath lecturers crisscrossed the country to give seminars on everything from resolving work conflicts to managing multiple projects. Brown and Dudley also discovered a need for training in specific



**Jerry Brown/Denise Dudley**

areas, such as team building and Total Quality Management. As a result, the company went from conducting 82 seminars in 1989 to more than 4,000 in 1993. The sale of books, audiocassettes, and videos on related business topics contributed to the increasing revenues.

The secret of their success is simple, Brown and Dudley say, and involves making work fun for themselves and their staff.

Says Dudley: "We more or less subscribe to the theory that if it isn't fun, it's not worth doing."

Rank	Company	Sales*			Employees	
		1990	1993	Growth	1990	1993
11	<b>Coast Intl. Long Distance Service</b>	\$425	\$3,625	753%	3	16
	This Overland Park long-distance carrier has mushroomed despite heavy competition from the industry's big guns. Discount prices and high-quality service are the reasons, says CEO Bijan Moaveni. The company also expanded by purchasing another long-distance carrier.					
12	<b>Henderson Engineers Inc.</b>	\$412	\$3,164	668%	6	49
	This Lenexa firm designs mechanical and electrical systems for almost every kind of large building. President Duane Henderson says top-notch engineering and competitive fees helped land a contract with Wal-Mart in 1989, which led to additional national clients.					
13	<b>Excel Temporary Services</b>	\$388	\$2,831	630%	2	7
	Founded in Kansas City in 1989, Excel Temporary Services places both permanent and temporary employees. Owners Marvin and Nancy Kleeb attribute the company's growth to perseverance, a dedicated and customer-oriented staff, and improvement in the local economy.					
14	<b>Century Personnel</b>	\$630	\$4,150	559%	7	15
	CEO Michael Jones bought this Overland Park employment agency in 1991, bringing with him an infusion of new capital, new personnel, and a background in human resources. He has since expanded, opening two more offices on Westport Road and North Oak Trafficway.					
15	<b>Cottage Care Inc.</b>	\$494	\$3,118	531%	82	137
	Employing a "scientific" approach to housecleaning and franchising the concept has meant continued growth for this company, headquartered in Overland Park. Receiving a 40 percent share of net profits motivates franchise managers across the country, says CEO Harold Finch.					
16	<b>B&amp;H Premier Housekeeping Systems</b>	\$236	\$1,450	514%	63	125
	"Housekeeping" for this Independence company means cleaning up medical facilities and office buildings. Planning for controlled growth has allowed the company to expand while avoiding "the pitfalls of sacrificing quality for quantity," says President Robert Bone.					
17	<b>Phelps Tool &amp; Die Company Inc.</b>	\$7,162	\$43,537	508%	64	350
	This dies, metal stampings, and assemblies manufacturer was named Small Business of the Year by the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce. Contracts with Xerox and Compac to produce computer chassis assemblies boosted revenues, says President Michael Phelps.					
18	<b>Grafton Inc.</b>	\$511	\$3,029	493%	4	10
	Carol J. Carroll and her husband, Richard, own this Kansas City service, which specializes in legal, executive assistant/secretarial, and engineering personnel. Specialization, satisfying customers, and word-of-mouth advertising has helped their company grow, the couple says.					
19	<b>SkillPath Inc.</b>	\$6,088	\$36,054	492%	35	140
	Fulfilling corporate training needs is the focus of this Kansas City human resource development company. Owners Jerry Brown and Denise Dudley expanded by offering seminars on topics such as business writing, team building, accounting, and Total Quality Management.					
20	<b>AmeriConnect</b>	\$2,321	\$13,304	473%	8	19
	This Overland Park company is a reseller of Sprint long-distance services. Creating a discount structure that customers understand and placing independent sales agents throughout the country significantly increased the company's revenues, says President Robert Kaemmer.					

\* Sales in thousands

## Gould Evans Affiliates

41

Gross Revenue 1994: \$9.444 million 1997: \$23.700 million **Growth: 150.95%** Full-time employees: 200  
This local architectural firm, last year's Small Business of the Year in Kansas City, has pushed hard to diversify geographically both at home and abroad. To meet the needs of high-growth, multi-site clients, the firm has developed a fast-track project management approach and increased in-house service capabilities.

## KTI

42

Gross Revenue 1994: \$430,000 1997: \$1.052 million **Growth: 144.65%** Full-time employees: 26  
KTI provides geotechnical investigation, environmental assessments and construction material testing and engineering services as well as special inspections for clients ranging from private developers and architectural firms to governmental agencies. A decision several years ago to expand the company's product line has paid big dividends.

## Cooperative Physician Services Inc.

43

Gross Revenue 1994: \$1.801 million 1997: \$4.286 million **Growth: 137.97%** Full-time employees: 189  
This physician services firm provides support to the Carondelet Primary Care Network and specialty practices. Services include temporary and temporary-to-permanent personnel placement, consulting and practice management services. CEO Sandra Rice says the firm has benefited as changes in the health care industry force providers to become more efficient.

## Idex

44

Gross Revenue 1994: \$789,000 1997: \$1.818 million **Growth: 130.41%** Full-time employees: 21  
Litigation defense support through research and database mining is the bread and butter of Idex. The company's clients include law firms, insurance companies and corporate law departments nationwide. Idex's proprietary data base includes information on more than 600,000 trial court and settled cases and grows by about 6,000 cases per month.

## Gragg Advertising and Design

45

Gross Revenue 1994: \$1.025 million 1997: \$2.358 million **Growth: 130.04%** Full-time employees: 6  
Gragg has been able to rack up powerful growth by developing a system to track and quantify the results of its advertising campaigns. CEO Gregory Gragg said the quantification process involves a lot of hard work and number crunching. But because clients ultimately know exactly what they received for their money, they love the service, he said.

## Rainy Day Books

46

Gross Revenue 1994: \$661,000 1997: \$1.455 million **Growth: 120.12%** Full-time employees: 13  
Rainy Day has defied the odds against independent book sellers by focusing on customer service, developing extensive knowledge about books and conducting community author events in partnership with local non-profit organizations and other groups. The off-site author events often include related information from other organizations.

## B&H Environmental Management Systems Inc.

47

Gross Revenue 1994: \$583,686 1997: \$1.247 million **Growth: 113.70%** Full-time employees: 25  
B&H started business in 1979 by providing general housekeeping and supply services for health care facilities. Over time, the company has evolved to include an information component, which helps health care providers stay in compliance with a variety of local, state and federal regulations, ranging from OSHA to the EPA.

## SKC Electric Inc.

48

Gross Revenue 1994: \$11 million 1997: \$23.483 million **Growth: 113.48%** Full-time employees: 260  
SKC specializes in the design and installation of electrical and data communications systems. President Larry Malach said that beyond the company's traditional new construction electrical contracting and service work, the firm has established a niche installing phone and data wiring. The company also offers electrical testing services to pinpoint any wiring problems.

## Walton Construction Company Inc.

49

Gross Revenue 1994: \$123.947 million 1997: \$261.692 million **Growth: 111.13%** Full-time employees: 440  
Founder Gregory Walton and President Ray Braswell have fueled this general contracting and construction management firm's impressive growth by developing national clients, opening divisional offices in Phoenix and Atlanta, emphasizing client service and satisfaction and developing the concept of pre-construction services.

## Michael Shirley Associates Inc.

50

Gross Revenue 1994: \$1.210 million 1997: \$2.528 million **Growth: 108.92%** Full-time employees: 13  
This retainer-based executive search firm has evolved from a regional midwestern client base to become a national firm respected for service excellence. The firm has consistently maintained 80 percent repeat client business, according to CEO Michael Shirley, who added that the majority of clients served are emerging growth companies.