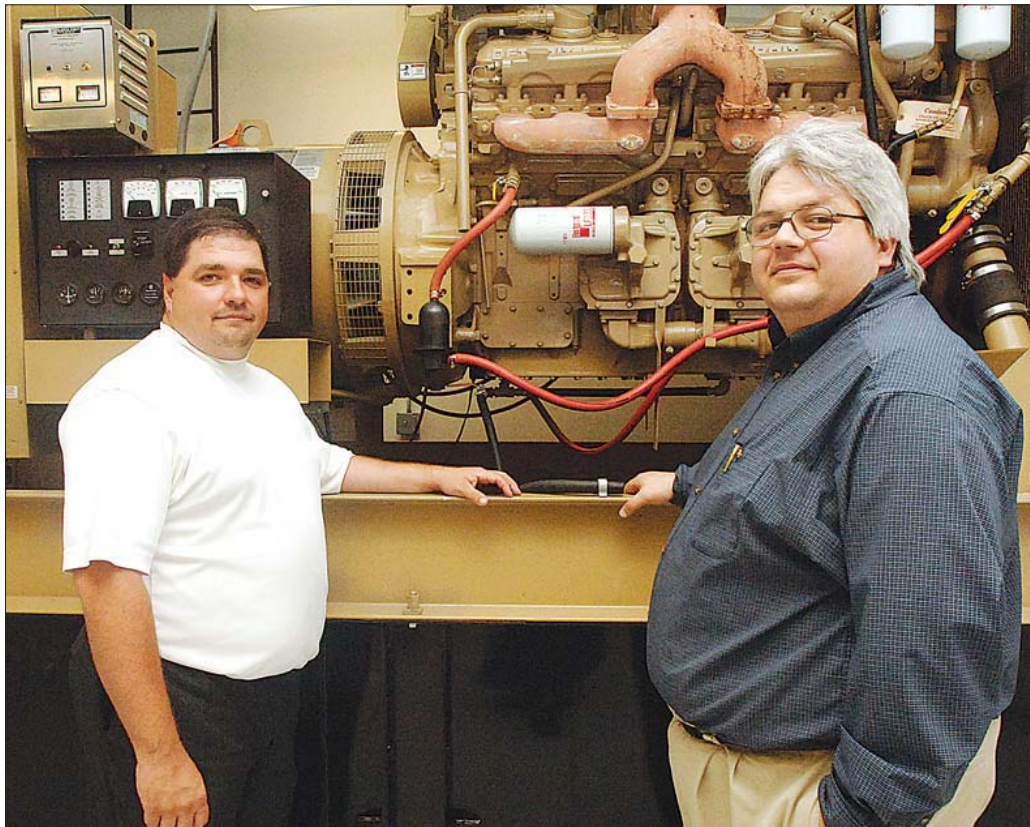


MAHONING VALLEY



The Vindicator

GOOD BACKUP: Mike Meloy, president of DRS, left, and Joe Ross, vice president, stand next to a generator that can power the company's Youngstown data center for 100 hours. The Southern Boulevard center stores critical data for offices and plants around the world.

Networking company expands with data center

A local business ranks as the 32nd fastest-growing technology company.

By DON SHILLING
VINDICATOR BUSINESS EDITOR

YOUNGSTOWN — Next to an abandoned pizza shop on the South Side sits something unexpected — a high-tech data center.

Customers around the world send sensitive information to the nondescript, brick building for storage or processing.

DRS, a North Lima computer networking company, bought the Southern Boulevard building two years ago from a telecommunications company that had outfitted it with the latest high-tech gear.

Oklahoma-based Williams Communications had set up a string of such centers in an attempt to build a high-speed, fiber-optic telecommunications system across the country.

With too much debt, it filed for bankruptcy in 2002 and later emerged under a new name, Wiltel.

Under DRS, the center serves as a safe place for hundreds of companies to back up their computer files each day.

The need for such a service is so much in demand that the local company changed its name to DRS, which stands for disaster recovery service.

Some companies rely on the center for more than backup work, however. These companies don't have their own computer staffs or they need the high-bandwidth Internet connection that the center offers.

Customers

- Here are some of those customers:
- Dozens of companies house all of their com-

puter intelligence in the center, with their employees using terminals instead of personal computers.

- A national provider of a service that sends e-mails to cell phones houses its computer server in the center. The service has 10,000 subscribers.
- A regional real estate company runs its video listing service from the center.
- A tree-cutting company operates its online training sessions through the center for employees in this country and other countries.

In 2000, DRS — then known as NSI Group — had just five employees and was focused on setting up computer networks. With the addition of the data center, it now employs 26.

"Our expansion has been fast and furious, and we don't see it letting up," said Mike Meloy, company president.

Besides the data center and its headquarters at 10260 Market St., North Lima, the company has opened offices in Pittsburgh and Columbus, which have a total of five technical and sales workers.

As it expands, DRS is looking to buy other Williams centers, including one in Akron.

DRS

Client list

Some of the clients of DRS:

- Mahoning, Trumbull and Columbiana counties
- Youngstown, Boardman and Newton Falls
- Salem and McDonald schools
- San Francisco 49ers
- Howard Hanna Real Estate
- Columbus Port Authority
- Butler Wick Corp.
- Ohio Savings and Loan
- Cellular One

Source: DRS

Recognition

The growth is being noticed in the high-tech industry. CRN, an industry publication, last month named DRS to its Fast Growth 100. The local company was named the 32nd fastest-growing technology company in the nation, with sales growing 190 percent last year to \$6.5 million.

Meloy said he expects sales to top \$10 million this year. Within the next two years, he expects to have between 50 and 60 employees.

Meloy said he's been surprised by the attention his company has received within the industry.

Jim Ervin, who used to be the network architect for the Federal Communications Commission, sent Meloy a résumé several times, and each time Meloy trashed it because he thought DRS was too small for someone who was over-seeing all of the computer networks for a major federal agency.

"Who does he think we are?" Meloy would ask himself.

"Finally, Jim just showed up at our door and asked if we had received his résumé," Meloy said.

Ervin, a Poland native, wanted to move back to the area and was referred to DRS by Cisco Systems, a provider of computer-related equipment. Ervin now is senior network engineer for DRS.

Ervin also is a partner, as are other top-notch engineers that DRS has attracted locally and from around the country. Knowing he had to do something special to keep talented engineers, Meloy allow them to receive an ownership stake in the company, similar to arrange-

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ments made by law firms.

Key

The key to the company's growth, however, has been the investment made in the data center by the Williams.

The systems it installed make the center a perfect place to store computer data, Meloy said.

The center has a generator that can hold 1,200 gallons of diesel fuel and can keep the center operating without electricity for 100 hours. Also, it has a battery stack that can operate the center for 16 hours, even though it only takes about five minutes for the generator to turn on.

The center also has two power lines entering the building, in case one is damaged by a construction crew outside, and it is connected by two fiber-optic lines.

The idea is to have redundancy, including two switches on important equipment, so all critical systems have a back up.

"We even have dual toilet paper here," Meloy joked.

The data center isn't the only source of the company's growth, however.

Meloy and Joe Ross, vice president of technology, were among a handful of workers who left Entre Computer in Canfield in 2000 to set up their own computer networking company. Entre closed a year later.

Their new company acquired several other small networking companies and then changed its name two years ago with its new focus on dis-



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ALTERNATE POWER: The DRS data center has electrical power, a backup generator and these battery stacks, which can power the operation for 16 hours in an emergency.

aster recovery.

The company continues to provide voice, data and security systems to companies in the region.

DRS is a seller of Cisco phone systems and its engineers set up communications systems for companies using Internet hookups.

It also uses remote monitors in its North Lima office to manage computer systems for companies, and of-

fers a Cisco security system that quarantines viruses and spyware and prevents electronic theft.

Meloy sits on a 23-member panel that advises Cisco on how to meet the needs of small businesses, allowing him to stay on top of the latest technology for those companies.

Up until now, Meloy has been satisfied with keeping a low profile. About 95 percent of the company's

customers are referrals.

In the past year, however, DRS has increased its sales force from one person to six. Meloy said he's intent on getting the word out about the data center, which has plenty of room for more customers.

"This is going to be really big for Youngstown," he said.

shilling@windy.com