

IN GOOD COMPANY

THREE GUYS MAKE 4WHAT A GLOBAL SUCCESS.

[by Jill Tyrer]

Michael Stumvoll's e-mail signature gives you more than just his contact information. With a simple click, he walks onto the screen, introduces himself, briefly explains the business technologies that he sells for networking giant Cisco Systems and then provides links for you to get more information.

Click on the "VoIPTrainer" link and another man appears, demonstrating step-by-step how to use Cisco's telephone system.

The man in that video is Jim Cossetta. He knows Cisco's technologies can be complex, and no printed manual or plodding PowerPoint can match an interactive presentation. The proof is in the success of Naples-based 4What Interactive, the multimedia company Cossetta and his partners co-own.

The VoIPTrainer e-learning tool is one of their creations. So is the ability of Stumvoll, business development manager for Cisco's World Wide Channels, to greet his e-mail readers "in person."

The exterior of 4What's offices, located in a nondescript industrial park off Old 41 Road, offers no hint of the busy environment inside. With a staff of about 20 project managers, programmers/designers, account executives and others, 4What on a typical day recently was juggling about 10 projects for Cisco, its biggest client, plus 20 to 30 additional projects.

Cossetta and co-owners Reid Atwood and Wade Mastro call their company a consulting business, "but in an interactive technology way," says Mastro. Their work ranges from creating e-learning systems and marketing products for multinational corporations like Cisco Systems and Discover Financial, to building Web sites for Southwest Florida International Airport, to turning a simple PDF into an interactive e-mail blast for a local Play N Trade video-game store franchisee.

HOPE AND CHARITY

Hope Hospice and Community Services cares for more than 2,200 people each day, and the business community is very supportive of our work, including our current campaign to build a Hope Hospice House in Lehigh Acres. In turn, the hospice supports the business community; when there is a traumatic workplace incident, our counselors are often called in to help employees cope.

QUALITY COUNTS

Quality Life Center provides prevention and intervention services for over 500 children and families annually, and despite these difficult economic times, businesses including Publix, BJ's Wholesale Club, Wal-Mart and Bank of America are still donating items and funding.



Brain trust: 4What partners (from left) Jim Cossetta, Wade Mastro and Reid Atwood.

Early Adopters

Since 1995, the 4What team has helped clients find ways to communicate more effectively—whether to reach new customers, teach people to use products or recruit new employees. The company combines professional video production with a variety of technologies, creating such interactive tools as touch-screen kiosks, virtual tours, online project-management programs and Web-based video—or "Wideo," as they call it.

When they started the company, Cossetta, Atwood and former partner Carl Rushford were working at NCH Healthcare System, and Mastro, a childhood friend of Cossetta's, had a small video production business. Atwood and Rushford, who worked in marketing, had gone to New York to learn about new presentation technologies when Cossetta got a phone call from them.

"They actually left the presentation, walked outside and called me from the street. They said, 'We just saw this new software called Macromedia Director, and it combines four elements: programming, graphics, business and video. Carl said, 'I'm the programmer, Reid's the graphics guy, you're the business guy and your buddy Wade is the video guy.' We all threw some money together, bought the software and made a hand move across the screen, and we're like 'Wow, what do we do with this?' It kind of evolved from there."

Through Mastro, who was working with a local

medical-training video company, the team heard about an opportunity to convert a successful video series to CD-ROM. "We threw together a proposal, submitted it, and we were awarded the contract for \$60,000," says Cossetta.

"And then we had to figure out how to do it," adds Atwood.

The three continued their NCH jobs, working on their new business after work, often until the early morning hours. Mastro, who had not only the video equipment but also the computer that they all used, took the production reins.

Up to that point, he had been churning out training videos with booklets to be presented in a classroom setting. With 4What, he explains, "What we were producing could be done on an individual level, on a CD-ROM. It was so new; I remember our biggest hurdle was [not knowing] how many people had CD-ROM drives. Discs were like \$7 apiece. We were definitely pushing the envelope."

With support and guidance from people like Edward Morton, then CEO of NCH, they grew the business, finally made the leap to full-time and eventually named the company 4What Interactive.

In spite of early warnings from Mastro's father that starting a business together could destroy their friendship, the partnership has worked. "We all bring something unique to company, and we trust each other so we're not stepping on each other's toes," says Mastro. "Not to say that we don't disagree on things, but we all trust each other for what we bring to the company."

Around 2000, Kent Technologies acquired the company. Rushford decided to leave, but the acquisition helped capitalize 4What and enabled the team to start two other companies during the heady dot-com rise—surgicaltechnique.com, an online clearinghouse for surgical manuals, and esportsventures.com, which promoted American basketball players to teams overseas. Then the dot-com crash came, "and when the dust cleared, we were still around," says Cossetta.

Eager to regain control of their company, the three remaining founders bought it back about a year and a half ago, and in 2008 chalked up about \$4.2 million in revenue.

Innovation Leader

4What's clients now include national and multinational corporations like Citrix Systems, Discover Financial and PetSmart, as well as local companies and organizations such as Southwest Florida International Airport, Ave Maria University and the Economic Development Council of

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Budding businessmen: (from top) Young Wade Mastro and Jim Cossetta celebrate New Year's Eve in 1984; the company Web site, featuring the partners, circa 1996.

Collier County's Project Innovation, an initiative designed to diversify the county's economy and promote the area to the technology industry.

"Their company is exactly the type of company that we want to grow here, so it's important to hear their perspective," says EDC President Tammie Nemecek. "Project Innovation is all about how we can think and act in new ways."

As with Stumvoll's e-mail greeting and many other 4What Wideos, Project Innovation's Web site features Nemecek and State Rep. Tom Grady in walk-out videos, greeting the viewer,

SOMETHING TO SMILE ABOUT

It's important for children to return to school with confidence and pride, but many parents can't afford to buy new school supplies and backpacks. When staff sees the smiles on the children's faces as they pick out a new backpack and load it with school supplies, it makes the efforts (at the Multicultural Centre of Southwest Florida) worthwhile.

HELP WHERE IT'S NEEDED

Southwest Florida Addiction Services recently completed construction of its new \$9 million Detoxification and Outpatient Treatment Center that was made possible by gifts from more than 375 donors, including many local businesses.

introducing the project and conveying the high-tech image EDC leaders want.

"It was really important for us to show we were as innovative as possible, not only internally, but [because] Project Innovation is being watched nationwide," says Nemecek.

The videos are shot in 4What's in-house green-screen studio, which enables effects that make the video more interactive. For example, the speaker might gesture to buttons or icons that appear on the screen. A sweep of his hand, and they whisk away.

"The whole idea is creating an environment that's interactive," says Mastro. "You don't have a paragraph and a video plays; someone walks out and you have an environment that's clickable, just like if a picture could come to life and you could click on it. It's an experience, not just information."

And it's adaptable to other platforms. "Once we create something, it can be ported anywhere. It can go to TV, CD-ROM, mobile devices, computer, memory sticks. It's a once-created, multiple-use approach, which is another differentiator for us," says Atwood. "In the past, you created video for TV, and if you wanted to move it to a different medium, you have to do all these things to adjust it. We shoot in high-definition, and it can be presented anywhere."

"We all have scripts we've written and movie ideas, but they haven't come to the surface yet because we haven't had time to do them."

What sets 4What apart from other multimedia and multi-marketing companies is its ability to customize products to suit a client's need and with attention to the bottom line, says Cossetta. It streamlines and integrates processes, which can cut time and expense. For instance, the company also has its own talent library with video clips of a variety of models and spokespeople. Instead of spending days or weeks finding the right spokesmodel, a client can check the talent library and make a selection within hours. No extensive searching, auditioning and hassle.

"The power behind our solutions is not just the glitz and the wow factor," says Cossetta. "We build a true return on investment around our solutions. For example, we actually record the hits/views and where they're coming from to provide valuable data to do future campaigning, research, what have you."

New Opportunities

One of 4What's most successful products is the VoIPTrainer, the e-learning tool it created to teach people how to use Cisco's voice-over-Internet-protocol phone system and make the most of its features. Now, when Cisco sells that phone system, the client gets 4What's VoIPTrainer as well. Clients include companies like PetSmart, where the turnover can be high, and each new employee must learn the phone system.

"We sell it throughout the world now through resellers, so all of Cisco's resellers are our resellers—AT&T, IBM, all the big boys," says Cossetta. "When they go to a Cisco phone solution, this Unified Communication solution, they need end-



In a day's work: (opposite) A 4What team makes a presentation. (from left) Jim Cossetta delivers from the company's green screen studio; a 4What production meeting.

"You can start a technology-based business in Southwest Florida and do business with the world."

user training, [and] they plug our solution into the mix."

As with many clients, 4What's relationship with Cisco expanded, and it created additional products for the corporation and adapted the e-learning tool for other uses.

"We originally created it as a training solution, but it has since grown into a support solution to help reduce support-desk calls as well as a sales solution to help those resellers explain unified communication in these home systems to their customers," says Atwood. "How do you demonstrate a phone when you go out to a customer? You can't take a phone and the whole system that goes along with it. This goes into detail, shows you how to use the phone and all the key features and functionalities, so they [also] use this as a sales tool." And it can be demonstrated from even an iPhone.

Despite the economy, 4What seems to be thriving by shifting with changing market demands. When the building industry was going strong, its 4What Builder Solutions Group did well with its Owner Update, which enabled builders to give absentee homeowners progress reports and manage construction projects online. Although the building industry's demand for Owner Update has slacked off, 4What has adapted the application to streamline its own processes, and it has focused more on e-learning to meet changing demands.

"Nobody's traveling," Cossetta notes. "Those who do travel need to go to events and come back with information that you can use. We've evolved e-learning to a point where it's more of an e-knowledge transfer."

After years of traveling and spending time away from their young families, 4What's partners are tired of being away, too, so they're focusing more energy on Southwest Florida companies and opportunities—including those that support the local economy, says Cossetta.

"I'd like companies to understand that you can start a tech-



nology-based business in Southwest Florida and do business with the world," he says. "There are a lot of young entrepreneurs out there who think they have to move to Silicon Valley or New York or Chicago or somewhere big to grow their company. That's not the case. We've been doing it since 1995 when the technology wasn't even really here, and we do business across the globe."

To hear its owners talk about their company's evolution and their visions for the future, it's not surprising that the Collier EDC named 4What among its "Champions of Innovation."

"We're always out there looking, possibly for a new product line or idea or company we'd like to start," says Cossetta. And at some point, they'd like to pursue another passion: film. They already do business films for clients, and they have connections in Hollywood, he adds.

"We all have scripts we've written and movie ideas, but they haven't come to the surface yet because we haven't had time to do them," says Atwood. "We're still focused on the business."