

Point & Click
...it's that simple

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ALL ABOUT BUSINESS IN NEW YORK'S GOLDEN APPLE

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The principals of Point and Click in their Purchase office (from left): Pat Chiappetta, vice president sales development, Frank P. Chiappetta, vice president skills development and Michael Potenza, president.

Software trainers find profitable market niche

By BOB CHUVALA

"When someone needs their computer to do something and it's not doing it and they don't know how to make it do it, we'll walk them down the development and training path," said Mike Potenza. "We'll tell them what software is out there, give advice, consult with them and then train them until the products are in service."

That, basically, is the niche Potenza and two others carved out when they founded Point and Click in Purchase eight years ago " any size business or corporation that needs help or advice for anything from navigating a computer program to networking company computers to consulting with a Fortune 500 information technology department.

More than half of Point and Click's business is training people, from the person who has never used a computer to those with a high level of computer skills, he said. One current student is a woman in her 60s who has been a bookkeeper all her life and is learning Excel and QuickBooks.

"We have training classes on site and off site for all different levels of users, from the home user and very small business to Fortune 500 companies," he said.

Potenza and Pasquale and Louise Buzzelli founded the business in 1995. "Louise was a computer trainer for a franchise national company that is now out of business," Potenza said. But while she was with the franchise company, she saw how the trio could create a competitive edge in the marketplace.

Those large franchise companies "were too big and had too much overhead," he said. "They were factories that had to churn out business. They had to make a certain amount of money each month or go out of business." And because of the pressure to create a profitable bottom line, "they would throw trainers into classes who were not experts, leading to a lot of client dissatisfaction."

The trio decided they could do it better. "Our competitive edge is that we're small enough that we guarantee customer satisfaction," Potenza said. "If the customer isn't satisfied, we don't send a bill. That's never happened."

Not a factory

"We started the business because we saw the need for it," Potenza said, especially the need for training classes taught by people who knew what they were talking about. And they discovered that a simple training class on a software program could lead to more business from the client.

"Someone would come in and get training in Excel and decide the next step would be more cost effective to train five or 10 employees at their site," said Pat Chiappetta, vice president of sales development. "Then, usually because of the relationship we build, the client may be interested in building a data base and ask if we do that. We really become a full-service provider of IT services, and that's how we build our reputation."

Point and Click (www.pointandclickinc.com) becomes, in essence, the IT department for small and mid-sized businesses and the training department for larger corporations. "Fortune 500 companies have their own IT departments, but they have no full-time trainers," Potenza said. "They'll use our trainers so they don't have to hire their own full-time people."

While training on software programs accounts for a bit more than half the company's revenues, the business also does networking installations and maintenance, Web site design and [hosting](#), program development and "whatever IT service a client needs and doesn't have in house," Potenza said.

"We've learned during the last year that we're the premier provider of IT training for Westchester County for sure," said Chiappetta. "The others have gone away."

Potenza said the three founders "consciously made a decision not to grow too big and not to take on any project or engagement we're not capable of handling. We want to make sure we can provide customized service to our clients and only grow as big as necessary. We're not a factory that must churn out a certain amount of work to stay in business."

A growing field

One way Potenza keeps his company lean is by using consultants as trainers. "We have five full-time trainers and a pool of 10 to 15 contractors," he said. Company revenues "vary based on the economy. In earlier years, we grossed more than \$1 million. Now, we're a little under that. The economy is picking up now, so next year we'll be over \$1 million."

One reason for the optimistic revenue growth is their expansion into Fairfield County, Conn., including using Fairfield University adjunct professors to teach soft skills such as supervisory skills or business letter writing.

And Point and Click is concentrating its training on teaching project management software programs. "It's really a [growing](#) technology field," Potenza said. "Any company has various projects it's working on, and now there's software that keeps track of dates and times and people and resources. Project management is

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a big area for IT professional training, teaching people how to be project managers. There are so many large projects going on where the point person is much more accountable for the dollars and people than in the past. There's no more fat, and you have to know where every dollar is being spent."

And the company is hustling to keep on top of new and changing technology. "One of the things we're looking at is wireless technology," Chiappetta said. "There are a lot of portability programs coming out, and a lot of executives are carrying Blackberries and Palms."

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