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The Sky is the Limit

George McKee leads TrueCommerce's Blistering Growth Spurt, Builds on his former entrepreneurial successes

By Bill Kirchner

Up on the wall of TrueCommerce President and CEO George McKee's corner office is a picture drawn by his young son, Nathan, of some blue clouds and a red airplane. Expressively illustrated with dry erase markers during a recent visit to his dad's office, the younger McKee seems to know what's really going on at TrueCommerce – onward and upward, sky's-the-limit growth.

"He told me not to erase that picture until I had to," McKee explains. If life imitates art, Nathan need not worry about a limited showing.

After scoring entrepreneurial success with Medtrex, a medical device company he co- founded and eventually sold to Johnson & Johnson, McKee accepted the helm of TrueCommerce in late 2000. Since 2001, the company has averaged nearly 100 percent annual growth by providing an electronic data interchange (EDI) solution designed for small to mid-tier companies. EDI is a form of e-commerce that, according to McKee, accounts for nearly 60 percent of all business-to-business transactions.

TrueCommerce customers are typically small manufacturers and wholesalers that have little or no in-house IT expertise and who have been mandated to implement EDI by their large, big-box retail customers.

"It's a cultural gap," McKee says. "TrueCommerce was founded to level the playing field, to deliver products and services that fit the needs of small businesses. "Think about a small business owner successful enough to sell their products to Wal- Mart, The Home Depot, Target or Kroger's. The good news is they have landed a marquee account. The bad news is they must now implement a highly sophisticated technology in order to keep the business. It's like telling my 7-year-old son he must understand calculus before he can have ice cream."

So where can you find the products sold through the help of TrueCommerce? According to McKee, the answer is "everywhere."

"If you go to any major shopping area, our customers supply product through virtually every one of those outlets," McKee says. "There's a new mall they've built on Route 228. There's Lowe's, Target, Family Christian Bookstore, McDonalds' and Staples. Transactions are routed through TrueCommerce to and from every one of those retailers."

"The market is continuing to grow," McKee notes. "The EDI market grows at over 10 percent a year. We're not only attracting those new to

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EDI, but the existing users of EDI are being asked to do more with it, so we're seeing new transactions, new documents going across EDI. As a result, transaction volumes have gone up dramatically. And large enterprises, like Wal-Mart, are saying, 'EDI is a major part of our business and we want to leverage more of it.'"

So what exactly has George McKee brought to TrueCommerce that accounts for its rapid growth? "Commercialization is the big thing. My background is in sales. Nothing happens until you sell a product to a customer and they pay you for it. You have to be relentless in the pursuit of your goals," McKee contends.

And what has TrueCommerce brought to George McKee? "I started and ran a manufacturing business, Medtrex, and we had our own products. We viewed the world from our own narrow perspective. [TrueCommerce] gives me an opportunity to view small- and medium-sized businesses on a very broad scale. It shows me the things that are consistent from business to business and also shows me the uniqueness and ingenuity of the American entrepreneur. It's truly remarkable when you can see what some people can build a successful business around."

This larger perspective has instilled in McKee a broader vision for TrueCommerce. "Now I'm a little more strategic. When I was younger, I wanted to work hard, make money and have fun," McKee admits. "Now, I really want to build something for the long term – work smarter and build momentum each day, to build a lasting entity."

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