

Old-school sales guy

HOW FRANK YARBOROUGH BUILT HIS COMPANY BY FORGING BOND WITH CLIENTS

By Chris Baysden

CARY – Most entrepreneurs can be placed into one of four broad classifications.

The first are people who were technically proficient in a certain area – like plumbers, for example – and learned the art of business as their company grew. Then there are the MBA recipients, who were weaned on business theory and may never engage in any grunt work.

Castoffs make up the third group: Company X lays off Joe Middle Manager, who strikes out on his own instead of returning to an established firm. But it's the fourth and final group to which Frank Yarborough belongs.

"I'm an old-school sales guy," says Yarborough, the majority owner of Cary-based Avcon Inc., which designs, installs and services audio-video equipment.

The 47-year-old Yarborough, a North Carolina State University alum and Cary native whose family has lived in the town for more than a century, founded Avcon 12 years ago. The company works on everything from sound systems to video conferencing, and its impressive corporate customer list includes the likes of SAS Institute, Cisco Systems, and Progress Energy.

While the firm has worked on projects with a price tag as large as \$1.5 million, the average job is under \$100,000.

Members of the other types of entrepreneurial groups can learn something from the style and approach Yarborough has used to build Avcon into a \$6 million company with 25 employees.

Like other members of the sales group, he is outgoing and loquacious. Those traits help him establish a relationship with potential customers, whether he meets them during the regular business day or on personal time.

Yarborough tries to forge this bond even



Steve Wilson

Avcon founder Frank Yarborough with some of his employees, from left, Sammie Pirog, Eb Strickland, Alison Davis and JoAnn Martin.

AVCON INC.

BUSINESS: Designs, installs and services audio and video equipment for local companies and churches

EMPLOYEES: 25

REVENUE: \$6 million

FOUNDER: Frank Yarborough, in 1997

OWNERS: Yarborough is the majority owner, while Engineering Manager Jeff Smith also has a stake in the company

if there is no immediate benefit; he's willing to be patient because the long-term payoff is worth the wait.

Being patient also gives him time to discover the potential customer's needs. It's not enough for Yarborough to be an expert on his own products and services; he must be able to demonstrate how they can benefit the customer.

Or, as Yarborough puts it, "Don't tell them, sell them."

His style and performance have won kudos from customers such as Eddie Sells, the facilities manager at Becton Dickinson and Co.'s Research Triangle Park location.

"Frank's very committed to customer service," says Sells, who has been an

Avcon customer for about a decade.

Sells likes the fact that Avcon sells products with long life expectancy and continues to service them for years after the installation. He's also been impressed by the willingness of Avcon employees to work after hours to meet their clients' needs.

Yarborough attends Cary's Summit Evangelical Covenant Church, where he plays drums in the church band. That background of faith has helped as Avcon has developed a strong business with local houses of worship over the years.

"It affects his understanding of our needs, certainly," says Larry Leake, the worship technology manager at Raleigh church Crossroads Fellowship. Leake has worked on projects with Avcon for about a decade, and he can attest to the benefits – both business and personal – of the relationships Yarborough develops with his customers.

"He's become a good friend to me over the years," says Leake.