

Vista soars with physician recruiting

Recruiting may be a business of the people, by the people and for the people, yet it can take one by surprise to find a company as people-oriented as Vista Staffing Solutions Inc.

"What gives a company of this type value is the people on the phones interacting with customers," said Mark Brouse, president and CEO of Salt Lake City-based Vista.

At Vista, the people on the phones are the people who own the company. Each employee owns company stock, and hence has a share in the company's profits. The ownership serves as a daily incentive, often making employees go the extra mile to retain clients. "We wanted the assets of the company that go home every night to be tied to the company in philosophy and in reality," Brouse said.

FOUNDATION. Thirteen years ago, three colleagues at Salt Lake City-based CompHealth Group sensed the opportunities that lay in the physician recruiting industry, and decided to explore them on their own. Mark Brouse, Katie Abby and Clarke Shaw left CompHealth and established Vista in 1990. They found a financial supporter in southern California-based angel-investor Bill Payne, owner of WHP Enterprises Inc., a Henderson NV-based investment and consulting company.

Since then, Brouse, Abby and Shaw have built the company into a 100 employee-business, generating revenue close to \$40 million a year. Locum tenens makes up about 98% of the revenue. "A high tide floats all ships," he said of the locum tenens industry. "The industry continues to expand and grow as healthcare providers continue to see value in using temporary physicians."

Permanent placement accounts for just 2% of Vista's revenue, and the company plans to grow it further.

GROWTH. Vista has diversified over the years, and covers a range of specialties as well as states. Though located in the southwest, Vista places physicians in all

50 states with no state accounting for more than 8% of its revenue. Despite the downturn, it has grown 27% year to date, and projects a 35% increase in third quarter revenue compared with last year's quarter.

"I've seen it grow. I've seen it mature. It's very exciting and very motivating," said Lori Douglas, division manager at Vista, who has been with the company since its inception.

She credits Vista's success largely to its focus on just one area of healthcare staffing. She believes the work culture also fosters loyalty. "The employees have ownership [of the company] and a sense of responsibility, and an environment in which they can make their decisions knowing they have the support of the company. We're a flat organization. You have your goals and targets, but nobody's standing over your shoulder," she said.

CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP. And the employees seem to be able to strike the right chords with their clients. "They're the first ones I call every time," said Dick Willett, administrator of Redington-Fairview General Hospital in Skowhegan ME. "I'm impressed with how they screen candidates. Whenever we've had problems with physicians, they've been dealt with rapidly." He said Vista's greatest strength is its responsiveness.

Physicians tend to agree. Dr. David Margraf, a pediatric critical care physician who has been working through Vista for three and a half years, said the company had kept him gainfully employed all these years. "Vista did a good job of keeping me at work," said Dr. Margraf, who appreciates Vista's attention to detail in matters such as organizing suitable flights and hotel reservations. "They get the stuff done that needs to get done," he said.

SECRET OF SUCCESS. The company has grown each year since its establishment, which Brouse attributes to being part of a growing industry. Companies in this field do not have the antagonistic relationships with medical facilities that their counterparts in the nurse

staffing business do. Hospitals tend to welcome them. “Physicians generate revenue,” Brouse said. “If you don’t have a physician in place, the overheads continue to grow, the revenue doesn’t. A physician is a revenue producer for the facility.”

Growth, along with the joys of increased revenue, also brings its share of challenges, such as developing infrastructure at a growing company. “The biggest

challenges have always been from internal activities,” Brouse said. “[It’s challenging] to wake up one day to 50 people reporting to two managers.”

However, employees feel the company handled such testing times well. “We’ve managed our growth very well,” Douglas said. “And we’re very good at what we do.”