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Wisniewski starts companies like others eat potato chips

Slow down is not in his vocabulary

Philadelphia Business Journal - by [Adam Stone](#) Special to the Business Journal

MOUNT LAUREL, N.J. — It was just about a year ago that we introduced you to Ken Wisniewski, the not-yet-40 brains behind VendorSeek, a business-to-business online matching system.

Wisniewski looked like a hot property, and he was. In May 2008 he sold the business for an undisclosed sum to vertical marketing firm [QuinStreet](#). VendorSeek was still on the upswing, Wisniewski said, but he felt it was time to till the soil afresh.

“My mother has a garden, and I like to watch that garden grow, to see those seeds turn into tomatoes,” he said. “I like watching the growth of an idea.”

His latest idea is [Webimax](#), another matching portal but this one built to serve as a hub for diverse business-to-consumer matching sites.

First up is JustWeddings.com, where brides can connect with florists, caterers and so on. Webimax is also in beta phase of LocalQuote.com, a site where consumers can get quotes on services ranging from carpets to lawyers to architects.

Webimax is self-funded from the proceeds of the VendorSeek sale, and employs about 20 people.

Those who know Wisniewski laud his focus, his ability to move a business forward in the face of shifting circumstance.

“I’d use the term ‘fearless.’ Nothing rattles him. He knows what he wants to do and sets out to do it,” said Steve Horowitz, a principal with business brokerage [Stevenz Group](#) in Evesham.

Horowitz helped Wisniewski sell Impact Direct, a little sideline business that the young entrepreneur brought to life while still shaping VendorSeek.

Who builds and sells a business while busy building and selling a business? A former shoe clerk, of course.

“As a teenager I worked a Kinney shoe store in the mall, and there was no real process for what would happen, no process to make sure people would be taken care of,” he said. “I worked on a marginal commission and I loved it, but I would see people leave the store before I could get to them, and I thought there just had to be a better way to manage this. But of course at 15, I couldn’t do anything to change the course of what this big company was doing.

“It wasn’t that I disliked taking orders or falling in line. I was just frustrated because I thought they could be running their business better.”

Left to his own devices, Wisniewski showed that he could do it better. From its earliest days VendorSeek drew the attention of venture capitalists and others who wanted to buy or finance the firm. A looming economic crisis convinced him to sell — get out while the getting is good — but only under one condition.

“It would have to give the employees the best opportunity to continue working there as if nothing had changed,” he said.

Wisniewski stayed on as a consultant after the sale, but anyone versed in these things could have seen that plan would not stick. Working for someone else? “It wasn’t for me,” he said.

So we come to Webimax, where Wisniewski is employing his considerable energies in pursuit of a regional growth strategy. He’s in Philadelphia and South Jersey today, working toward deployments in New York and Boston, followed by Atlanta, Chicago and Miami, with an eventual West Coast expansion.

The trick to that kind of growth is having one heck of a technology infrastructure.

“We have people who never traveled to Boston and now they are trying to sell the service in Boston but they don’t know the geography that well,” he explained.

To help his people sell efficiently — to find the right businesses in the right neighborhoods — Wisniewski has spent \$500,000 building a massive database identifying every florist, caterer, wedding band, etc., within the target areas. It was no small feat to compile the database. Wisniewski bought up very large lists of businesses and tapped into other sources he’d rather not disclose.



Curt Hudson

Ken Wisniewski of Webimax, with laptops displaying some of the multiple Web sites his company runs.

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"If we had this at VendorSeek, we could have grown so much more quickly and done so much more," he lamented.

Without this support from the home office, he said, sales reps could be wandering the avenues ineffectually. Having access to this level of detail within potential markets is going to help them laser-focus their efforts.

The database is just one plan sprung from a mind that is ever-simmering with business propositions.

"Some nights I just lie awake thinking of all these different ideas. I have a notebook that I keep with probably a thousand other ideas of different businesses that I might be able to roll out at some time," he said. "Sometimes I wonder whether that is a good thing."

Well, sleep is probably overrated.

Up Close

Name: Ken Wisniewski

Age: 37

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Best business decision: Investing in technology to fuel geographic expansion.

Key challenge overcome: "Wrestling with the decision to sell my first business."

Advice to other young entrepreneurs: "Being an entrepreneur means you don't take the safe route."

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