

Adtec merges fun ideas, useful products

By Don Mooradian

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Adtec Digital is not a household name, but the 20-year-old Nashville company makes products people on all seven continents have, in one way or another, seen or used.

Disney World, Las Vegas casinos, cable television companies, airports, hospitals and many other kinds of businesses and institutions have utilized audio, visual and multi-media equipment Adtec personnel have thought up, invented and manufactured.

"If it involves video, we deal with it," said Ron Johnson, vice president of marketing and operations for the company he helped found.

In the recent past, Adtec Digital (previously Adtec Productions Inc.) helped a group develop a way to project video images onto a thin mist of water that looked like smoke. Another recent discussion involved getting a video presentation to smell like chocolate chip cookies.

Johnson said what the company's clients want is very simple.

"They want more capabilities for less money," he said. "We look at the market and see what others are doing or what they aren't doing. If others are doing it, we do it better."

He also said that if something is not being done, it might mean it is time to see if it can be done and if there is a market for it.

"What can we do that hasn't been done before — especially with pizzazz?" Johnson said, explaining one of the company's motivating philosophies.

"We continue to look for methods to project video in a new way and with products that people might like. We want to make presentations and entertainment better by using video," Johnson said. "We think so far outside the box, it isn't funny."

Johnson conceded he has some consultants in the family. "I talk with my boys a lot," he said, referring to his two sons, ages 15 and 10.

Both boys have helped generate ideas — one involved providing riders with lasers to shoot at aliens on the *Men In Black* ride at Universal Studios in Orlando.

Change has been non-stop since

the company began.

While a student at Tennessee Technological University in Cookeville in the early 1980s, Johnson developed a closed-circuit television system to inform students of campus-related activities.

He was joined by fellow students Andre Ancelin and David Cook, and the three of them developed an automated system that television stations could use to schedule advertisements into programs.

Following graduation in 1985, the trio raised \$10,000 and started Adtec Productions Inc. in Nashville.

Their main products were VCR controllers, switchers and text character generators for the closed circuit (hospitals and universities), cable and broadcast television markets. Some of the equipment is still in operation around the world, according to Johnson.

As sales picked up, Adtec engineering and manufacturing operations were moved to Jacksonville, Fla., and the three founders recruited engineer Kevin Ancelin, Andre's brother and an initial investor in the company, to join them.

The four men still hold the key Adtec leadership positions and make up the company's board of directors.

The company now has 54 employees with its headquarters at 408 Russell St. near The Coliseum.

Johnson estimates that Adtec currently has about 35,000 pieces of equipment in operation around the world.

The continuing expansion of communication tools and delivery systems keeps Adtec looking for new ways to deliver video on cell phones, computers, televisions via satellite, wide area networks, and just about anything else that is coming down the pike.

"There will be more and more advertisements on cell phones and other mobile devices," Johnson predicted, "and they will improve in quality."

And, of possible interest to local companies offering tours in Music City, there might soon be video travel tapes that pop on automatically when a tour bus approaches a landmark, with its location detected by a Global Positioning System.

BIZ OUTSIDE THE BOX



Photo by Mike Strasinger

David Cook, right, and Ron Johnson joined up with Andre and Kevin Ancelin (not pictured) over 20 years ago to form Adtec Digital, an audio-visual production company that now has over 35,000 pieces of equipment in operation around the world.

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