

## Secrets of Success Sevnthsin

- 1 Be passionate about what you do; if you're not, it will show in your end product.
- 2 Find a balance. Your work is important, but it's not all that defines you.
- 3 See the world. Literally. Go see the rest of the world and let it inspire you and shape the things you do.

related clothing companies. While he held down a day job after graduation, his sideline promotional work soon expanded to include bigger clients, and within a couple of years he made the leap. "I always knew that if I put all of myself into something, there was no way it couldn't work in some way,

shape or form," he says. "So the concept of quitting my day job never really scared me."

One of the challenges Erickson has faced in growing Sevnthsin since its official launch in 2006 is "explaining exactly what we do here," he says. "We're not just a creative shop; we're not just a technology shop. We're a weird melding of creative, strategy, technology, development, and more."

As technology-oriented and change-driven as Sevnthsin may be, Erickson stresses that the traditional values of quality and service are equally important to its success. "Quality and service are a huge part of our business," he says. "We genuinely pride ourselves on our relationships with our clients. We want them to want to work with us as much as we want to work with them. So our focus is always on creating the best possible end product for them, because we want *all* sides of the table to be as excited about the end product as we are."

Erickson has no illusions about the challenges Sevnthsin will face in a business characterized by continuous change—but he's confident about his ability to meet them. Much of that confidence flows from his belief in the power of creativity. "Creativity (in business) rarely means being able to draw pretty pictures or paint or anything like that," he says. "It means being able to see things in a way that someone else can't—or won't. It means being able to see opportunity where there doesn't appear to be any, being able to adapt and change as you grow, both personally and as a business. I think that's often very apparent in some of the best businesses in the world."

**Michael J. McDermott**, a freelance writer specializing in business and technology, is based in Carmel, New York. Businesses profiled in this column are clients of Northwestern Mutual. If there is a business you would like to nominate for Creative Business, please contact *Creative Living* editor Catherine O'Neill Grace at [cgrace@tmgcustommedia.com](mailto:cgrace@tmgcustommedia.com).

## MAKING TECHNOLOGY USEFUL AND USABLE

When Harry Bailes started Family Health Network in April 2009, his vision for the company centered on providing a technology-enabled solution for senior citizens to reconnect with family members and stay in closer touch through video chats, emails, and sharing of family photos. That remains a primary function of the company's flagship product, Connected for Life, but even in its short two years of existence, Family Health Network has seen new opportunities arise—and it has moved quickly to capitalize on them.

"It is now becoming apparent that our approach can play a broader role in the changes that are occurring in our country's health care system," Bailes says. "Because our platform allows patients living at home, or connected by new technologies such as tablets and smartphones, to record and share information with their families and health care providers, we are positioned to play a significant role in defining a new approach to the patient side of health care." Bailes expects that role to lead to dramatic growth for Family Health Network, much of it fueled by the key relationships the company has been nurturing in the early stages of its business.

The company initially developed Connected for Life to address what Bailes describes as "one of the most obvious needs facing our society": caring for a rapidly aging population that is living longer at a time when families, the traditional primary providers of care, are becoming more widely dispersed.

Bailes was a co-founder of KOZ.com, an early leader in the Internet's social networking phenomenon, and has been an entrepreneur for much of his career, usually in tech-related ventures. He recognized early that technology could play a role in the reconnection of families and their active participation in the care of aging family members. "However, many of these aging family members had grown up before technology use was widespread," he says, pointing out that they were being left behind by technology that can be intimidating to many elderly folks.



Family Health Network's first challenge was to assemble a low-cost platform that seniors with little or no technology experience could use and from which they could still derive meaningful benefits. "Creativity came into play in having the experience and insight to recognize that we could bring together existing technologies to create a solution that was not easily visualized from the separate components," Bailes says.

Family Health Network's team is deep in relevant expertise. Doug Patton, the company's chief knowledge officer, was a co-founder of KOZ.com; Eric Steimle, chief technology officer, is experienced in the development of senior technologies; and advisory board member Keith Dixon is the former president of a major health insurer's billion-dollar technology solutions division. "Confidence in our ability to succeed came from our previous experience developing easy-to-use Web publishing tools for nontechnical users," Bailes says.

The core product, which the company offers in both software subscription packages and software/hardware combinations, makes it easy for seniors to connect with family, friends, health care providers, churches, and other organizations. They can share family pictures; use email in a simple, user-friendly

format; participate in video chats; explore the Internet easily, even with no prior computer experience; and manage medications and keep a record of their health and well-being.

The product facilitates family participation in caregiving, making it easy to monitor daily health status and trends and to track medication adherence. Health care professionals can participate in video visits with patients and family members, collapsing travel time and distance, and they gain easy access to important health information from both the patient and

the caregivers.

The company spent the first 12 months of its existence developing the product and the next six months in early trial deployment. "So our real growth is only just beginning," Bailes says. Besides adapting its business model to include a greater health care management component, the company has also tweaked its technology to accommodate the rapidly growing role of mobile communications and tablet devices in redefining the software marketplace.

What has Bailes learned from the rapid-fire pace of change at Family Health Network? "Never believe you have all the answers, or that you can predict the marketplace," he says. "It is much more important to assemble a team that is synergistic and will enable the business to flex as the marketplace requires."

## Secrets of Success Family Health Network

- 1 Surround yourself with people who are brighter than you and share your passion.
- 2 Establish relationships early with people who can accelerate the opportunity.
- 3 Be prepared to address change and target the opportunities it presents.

**Snapshot:** Family Health Network

**Business:** Senior-friendly connectivity technology

**Founder:** Harry Bailes

**Location:** Research Triangle Park, North Carolina

**Established:** 2009

**Employees:** 12

**Mission:** To help seniors at home access and use new and emerging technologies to connect with family, friends, and health care providers.

**Quote:** "The future of our business is dependent on our members sharing their experience with family and friends. If that experience is not positive, growth will not occur."

**Northwestern Mutual Financial Representative:** Tim Albertson, Greensboro, North Carolina