

MINORITY BUSINESS

BUSINESS OWNER

Navigating the maze

ABC helps clients with telecom charges

BY FRANK JOSSI

Trust your phone bill? Think again, says Nita Singh, founder and CEO of American Business Communication Inc. She says her firm has saved clients more than \$100 million in telecommunications charges since opening 12 years ago.

Singh's \$3 million business has managed to grow consistently without spending any money on marketing or a sales staff. The key to ABC's success, she said, comes down to customer service and a continuing expansion of services to include nearly all aspects of telecom consulting. The Maple Grove-based company provides bill auditing, telemanagement outsourcing, carrier selection and telecommunications procurement.

In other words, ABC audits bills looking for errors (which it finds more than 90 percent of the time), assists in sourcing telecom providers for phone and data service and negotiates contracts on behalf of clients with those providers, said Singh. ABC also will manage many parts of a client's telecom needs, from choosing a carrier to buying a new phone system to monitoring monthly bills for accuracy.

The company works with clients in a variety of ways. ABC will take a percentage of the savings on bill audits, usually by finding a client's request for phone line disconnections have not been honored or bills incorrectly figured for services provided, sometimes saving clients as much as 50 percent on their bills, she said. The bill audit process convinces many clients to sign on to longer retainer contracts, added Singh.

The "sweet spot" of clients for ABC generally is those with telecom bills of more than \$10,000 a month, among them Regis Corp., Room & Board, American Collectors Association and Haworth Marketing & Media Co.

"What they do is take us through the telecommunications maze," said Bruce Gasperlin, chief financial officer of Minneapolis-based Haworth. "If you look at a phone bill it makes no sense whatsoever. They can take us through it and look for cost savings."

ABC managed the telecom portion of Haworth's move from the suburbs to downtown Minneapolis more than a year ago and is currently helping in selecting a new phone carrier. Haworth has used ABC for 12 years and watched the company grow "from a much smaller operation to a much larger one," he said. "It's been neat to see."

Born in India, Singh's family moved to the Detroit area when she was 8 years old. After attending Oakland Community College in Southview, Mich.,

she joined Birmingham, Mich.-based Allnet Communications Inc., now part of Global Crossing. She served in several managerial positions before moving to Minneapolis to serve as a district manager, where she increased sales revenue of the staff substantially and before starting ABC in 1990.

The business has grown to 10 employees and may add another three or four by the end of this year, said Singh. Part of the increase in business comes as a direct result of bad customer service from major telecom providers ranging from AT&T to Qwest. Even large companies no longer have a dedicated service person assigned to them and must use a toll-free number to get answers or solve problems.

Add to that the number of bills — from providers of wireless, data and voice — and ABC's services have an appeal. "These bills are getting more and more complex and there is more confusion about them," she said. "The average business that hires us has an accounts payable person who just pays the bills without studying them. They won't know that the bill is often wrong."

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themselves and for her. She was 12 when her parents separated and her mother raised her alone. Singh's drive and determination comes by way of her mother, who taught her she was capable of anything. "She made it so that I thought there was nothing I couldn't do," said Singh, herself a married mother of a 2 1/2-year-old boy. "She passed away seven years ago and I still miss her."

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Nita Singh said American Business Communication's success has been built on customer service and a continuing expansion of its telecom consulting services.

Outside of operating ABC, Singh has been involved since 1995 with Camp Heartland, a nonprofit dedicated to assisting children with HIV/AIDS or who are affected by it in some way.

Initially, Camp Heartland's staff called because the organization was the subject in 1995 of a CBS made-for-television movie called *Angelie's Secret* and it needed a phone system to handle what became thousands of calls offering donations. ABC continues to work with Camp Heartland on its fund drives.

Singh, 37, says she knows her parents moved to the United States for better opportunities for