

thinking BIG

BY DEANNE TOTO

John Miller has grown WesTex Document into the dominant independently owned information management company in west Texas.

When John Miller formed WesTex Document in 1997 as a mobile document destruction company, his sights were set on something much bigger.

"When I started WesTex in '97, I always envisioned the triad of records management: shredding, storage and imaging," Miller says. "But you have to be successful in one service area before you gamble on moving into another area."

A decade later, Miller's strategy has made his vision a reality. WesTex, based in Lubbock, Texas, has expanded out of Miller's garage in Midland, Texas, into a 44,000-square-foot facility on the campus of the former Reese Air Force Base, which is now home to the Reese Science and Technology Center.

WesTex Document needs the extra space its current location offers to accommodate its expanded menu of services. The company now offers on-site and off-site information destruction, records storage, media vaulting and

imaging services. WesTex Document also is preparing to take over management of the Reese Data Center as a subcontractor for the Reese Air Force Base Redevelopment Authority this fall. Its services will include disk-to-disk backup and recovery, disaster recovery services and collocation operations.

Now that WesTex offers a full spectrum of information management services, Miller says he expects to attract more of his competitors' customers.

WesTex Document's growth throughout the last decade has been incremental, because Miller says controlled growth and a solid financial footing are critical to a company's long-term success. The first step that enabled WesTex to achieve its current annual growth rate of 30 percent was moving from Midland to the more central location of Lubbock.

GETTING CENTERED

In 1996, Miller decided to open his own service business, and his background in law enforcement and the

military made information destruction particularly appealing.

"After doing market research and writing a business plan, I put together my own truck using an industrial model shredder on a used Ryder truck and a 35-kilowatt generator," he says. "The bankers thought I was crazy, but with a family loan of \$30,000 as collateral, I finally found a bank to lend me \$60,000 after depositing the \$30,000 in their bank."

He continues, "I kept my day job for three years, growing the business, and in 2000 made the decision to give up the safety of a monthly paycheck and concentrate 100 percent of my energy on the business."

By this point in the company's history, WesTex already had expanded to offer off-site destruction services in Midland.

Miller says he realized in 2003 that WesTex Document's original Midland location presented a number of drawbacks, so he moved his family and the business 100 miles north to Lubbock,



AT A GLANCE: WesTex Document

President and CEO: John Miller

Location: Lubbock, Texas

Employees: 32

Equipment: One ShredFast collection truck; one Shred-Fast mobile truck; two Shred-Tech mobile trucks; a Shred-Tech 75 plant-based shredder with a pit-fed metered conveyor from Allegheny Shredders; a 30-horsepower strip shredder from Allegheny; an American Baler auto-tie

baler; records storage software and scanners from O'Neil Software; four high-speed paper scanners; a microfilm converter; a wide-format scanner/printer/copier; and an EMC/Dell 2TB SAN, housing two SQL Servers and three other servers and a DVR, on a fiber-optic network

Services Provided: On-site and off-site document destruction; records storage; digital imaging; and data center operations for disk-to-disk backup and recovery, disaster recovery services and collocation operations



Employees in the document destruction area of WesTex Document.

the center of his market area. "Our model was to have the central location in the market and respond with services from there, and it has been a successful decision.

"That move was a strategic success and included our expansion of services into records storage and imaging," he says.

As a result of the move, Miller says WesTex has been able to reduce its op-

erating costs and dominate the region from a market standpoint.

"Five years ago, we were shredding, baling and shipping approximately 20 tons of paper per month—we now ship 250 tons and earn about \$45,000 in selling the scrap to paper mills each month," Miller says.

"We had no records in storage five years ago, and now have 28,000 and just purchased racking for another 20,000, which should be filled by year's end. We've completed approximately \$63,000 in imaging thus far this year, and that is up 60 percent over last year."

Additionally, WesTex recently added a machine to digitize microfilm, a third mobile shredding truck and a \$250,000 FireLock vault for digital media and standard records storage for companies in the nuclear industry.

"The west Texas region is growing at a healthy rate from Amarillo to Midland," Miller says. "Lubbock is home to Texas Tech University as well as Covenant Hospital and University Medical Center. As the Baby Boomer generation ages, the medical industry is growing to meet their demands."

WesTex has grown to meet the demands of the medical industry in west Texas, which, along with the financial sector, forms the company's customer base. Since relocating to Lubbock, WesTex also has become a strategic partner with Texas Tech and has added clients in the nuclear industry based in eastern New Mexico.

"About a year-and-a-half ago, we placed two shred containers at a new nuclear enrichment facility being built over in New Mexico and serviced them once a month," Miller says. "We now have over 60 [containers] being serviced weekly and are storing records for them in our new vault and in our regular storage facility after having achieved NQA-1 certification for nuclear records."

The American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) Nuclear Quality Assurance—Level 1 (NQA-1) standard covers quality assurance requirements for nuclear facility applications.

DEFINING PRIORITIES

WesTex Document's pursuit of clients in the nuclear industry has led the company to emphasize quality as-

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insurance in its daily operations, Miller says. Such a quality assurance program, which includes extensive documentation of each area of the operation, is critical to obtaining NQA-1 certification, he says.

"Quality assurance is all about documenting things and ensuring they are done," Miller says.

"Your whole team has to be on-board with the concept of quality your company represents," he says. "It's not about a logo or an ethics statement, it's about living and breathing what your organization is about and who you are."

Rather than rely on certifications to sell his company, Miller prefers to invite prospective clients to tour the WesTex Document facility.

"You have to earn their trust by showing them your capabilities," he says. "Show them what they need to see but are not looking for."

WesTex emphasizes service and security, which Miller says comes at a price. "It is not about the price to be competitive with your competition," he says. "It is about charging

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PUBLIC SERVANT

John Miller, president and CEO of WesTex Document, Lubbock, Texas, wants to put his business experience to use outside of his company's conference room. This fall, Miller is running for Lubbock County Commissioner, which could prove challenging for a Democrat running in a highly conservative area. However, Miller is counting on his business experience to put him ahead of the Republican candidate when the votes are tallied the night of Nov. 4.

The current commissioner has raised taxes yearly but is still running the county in the red, Miller says. "A businessman who understands finances can give taxpayers more value."

Miller previously ran for sheriff in Maine and for that state's legislature and has run twice for the Texas State Legislature.

He has an associate's degree in law enforcement and a bachelor's degree in behavioral science from the University of Maine and an MBA from Oklahoma City University. Miller retired from the U.S. Army in March of 2008 as a lieutenant colonel with nearly 40 years of service and has served as a police chief and a federal agent. He has professional credentials in homeland security and sensitive security information.

Miller says, "WesTex Document is well known and well respected as a business. I have shown the people we make solid business decisions. That carries over to doing local government business as well."

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the price that permits you to service the customer better than the other guy can. The reputation of your company will make it a success or failure, not the price you charge.”

Miller says his commitment to security is evident from the design of the WesTex facility.

DESIGNING SECURITY

WesTex Document inhabits the former commissary at Reese Air Force Base, which offers the company a number of loading docks that are critical to the operation of the information destruction segment of the business.

A 10,000-square-foot area that used to serve as the bulk storage room for the commissary is now equipped with racking for records storage. The former commissary’s retail area houses WesTex’s FireLock media vault, which features racking for some 12,000 boxes, Miller says. All of the company’s imaging services are performed in the office area of the former commissary, which was already equipped with the required computer and telephone lines.

The building, which is constructed of reinforced concrete cinder block and features 20-foot-high ceilings, full perimeter fencing, a fire suppression system and an alarm system, was converted easily to meet the needs of WesTex Document. However, Miller did encounter some challenges in getting the building’s existing sprinkler system working again after it sat dormant for more than 10 years. “The whole building is on a wet sprinkler system with smoke detectors,” he says. The sediment in the sprinkler lines and

heads had to be flushed out and many of the system’s heads and gauges had to be replaced, he notes.

Miller also added drop-down fire doors with a three-hour fire rating in the records storage room to further protect against fire.

A digital camera system equipped with 16 cameras monitors the facility. The system features three hard drives for redundancy, and its DVR can store nine months of video, which is backed up remotely.

Miller says these precautions ensure facility security, further distinguishing WesTex from its competitors and illustrating its commitment to its clients.

FOLLOWING THROUGH

Miller says he believes business growth is only possible by reinvesting in his company and its personnel. “You can’t do that if you are the cheapest guy in town,” he says. “You make investments in your company because you are making investments in your customers.”

To those entrepreneurs who feel pressure to respond to their competitors sales tactics by lowering their prices, Miller cautions, “It’s a losing situation to undercut prices to get boxes out of a competitor’s location.”

He also cautions against promising customers more than a company’s capabilities allow. “You cannot under-deliver on your promises,” Miller says. “If you can’t do something, don’t take it on. You can’t recover from a damaged reputation.” ■

The author is editor of Secure Destruction Business and can be contacted at dtoto@gie.net.

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