

## **SOUTH SHORE INSIDER - JOB SECURITY: Tragedy, technology have changed Norwell man's business**

*A.J. BAUER The Patriot Ledger, December 19, 2007*

**NORWELL** - Technology and fear are the driving forces of the security industry. And with each growing by the year, so too do companies like Signet Electronic Systems Inc. in Norwell.

Brad Caron, a 42-year-old Norwell resident and executive vice president of Signet, has grown up alongside the industry.

His father, Signet president Charles Caron, founded the company in 1974. It has since grown to employ 140 people and collect more than \$28 million in annual sales. About 40 percent of the firm's business comes from contracts with school districts throughout the South Shore. Brad Caron attributes much of Signet's growth to the company's ability to stay ahead of the technology curve. But he says recent increases in government contracts have certainly helped.

What kind of products do you see your school district clients asking for these days?

Well, it changes, but right now networking is a large factor. Only several years ago, new schools were installing a computer lab. And now over the last five or 10 years, that computer lab has blossomed into every single classroom having a computer lab, so it needs that infrastructure there to support that. That has been a tremendous area of growth for us, where before it was one computer lab, now it's all 100 classrooms.

Also, security. Years ago, they were only interested in protecting the assets in the building. So they would have a key pad so the custodian could arm the system, (and) come in and disarm it the next day. That's all they wanted. Now we do a lot of video surveillance cameras, we do a lot of access control so they can lock-down buildings in the case of emergency. So it's gone from a basic burglar alarm type system to an integrated security solution.

You mention changes in the industry over the years. Do you think an employee from back then would recognize the industry today?

No, they wouldn't. Just ask my father. It was a lot more mechanical, a lot more laborious - a lot more labor required to install these solutions. How it's changed now is that we're using the network, everything is Internet Protocol based, so the infrastructure is laid (out). Instead of a (personal computer) it's now a camera sitting on a network. So it's much less electrical oriented and much more network oriented.

What did the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks do to your industry?

Well, it increased awareness, number one. Number two, it freed up funding, both on the homeland security front, but also just on the local front. School committees started releasing money so they could protect their schools. So it's not just a homeland security issue - which, we have had a spike in our business as a result of homeland security funding - however that's only part of it. The other part is just locally, school districts that are under financial pressure always seem to come up with money to secure their schools. It's much more of a priority because of a 9/11 event or a Columbine event than it has been in the past.

Between the two, which raised more awareness in terms of the types of clients you deal with?

In our market, I'd have to say it was Columbine, because we do a lot of work in the kindergarten through 12th grade markets and that really just increased the awareness. From being able to send out an emergency page throughout a school, to being able to lock down a school, to being able to allow police access to a school remotely - that really increased everybody's awareness.

As we get further away from such tragedies, are sales flattening out?

I think there's definitely a spike in awareness after a tragedy, but there always seems to be another tragedy to take its place. For us it was, just recently, Virginia Tech. So that just sparked the awareness all over again. And we got a spike of calls looking for global emergency notification systems so that they can notify students' cell phones and pagers and e-mail addresses, and so on.

Do you find that after the spike sales go back to normal, or is there a ratcheting effect?

I think there's a spike and it levels out at a higher level every time. Unfortunately, I think our innocence is probably tainted so it doesn't go back to pre-9/11. It just spikes and it stays high.

A.J. Bauer may be reached at [ajbauer@ledger.com](mailto:ajbauer@ledger.com).