



ROC Business

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SMALL BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

SAELIG SEES STEADY GROWTH

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Staff writer

Saelig Co., while popular with electronics hobbyists and medical device company engineers, was having a tougher time with delivery services.

The electronics reseller relocated late last year to 6,000 square feet of space in Perinton, moving from roughly half the square footage in Bushnell's Basin. "We were on the second floor, so UPS didn't like us very much," said founder/President Alan Lowne. "They're much happier now."

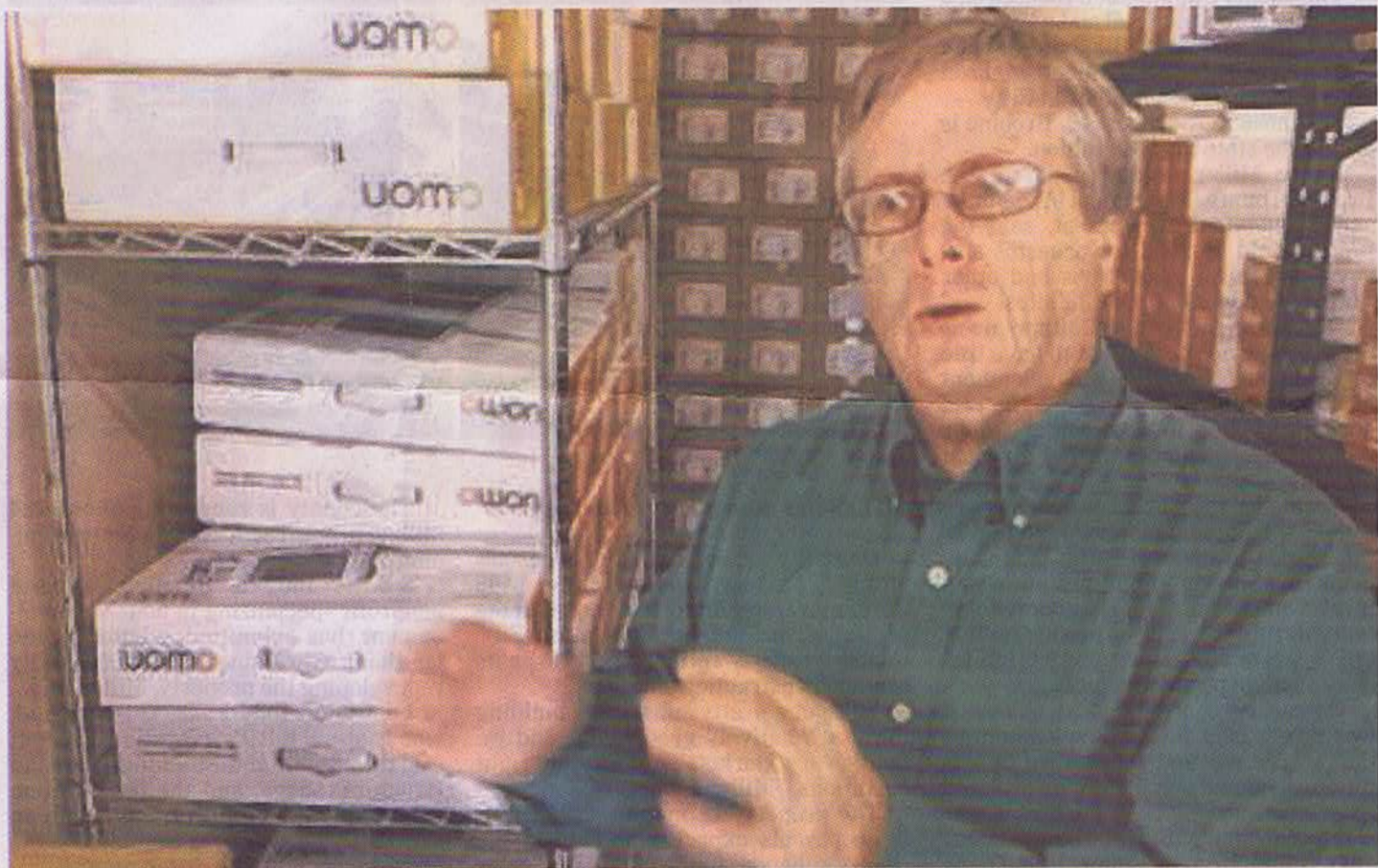
In its 25-year history, Saelig has grown from a sideline gig Lowne ran out of his bedroom while working full-time at Eastman Kodak Co. Today, he runs a 14-person company reselling equipment such as oscilloscopes, spectrum analyzers, industrial PCs, and 3D printers from roughly 100 manufacturers around the globe.

"I'm an engineer, basically," said Lowne. "I know what engineers want, so I stock what I want as an engineer. Things that interest me and things that are in demand but not generally available are what we stock. The real recipe for success is find something nobody else has, I'm the only one who has it, and everybody wants it. That's my continual search and goal."

Lowne discussed the company's growth, the safest way to start a business, and how there's a hidden message of Christian faith in every Saelig shipment:

I'm not a high-risk person. And having kids in college, being a low-risk person, I thought, "Let's keep this going as a part-time safety net while I have a steady job, see what happens." The safest way to start a business is start it part time. I probably should have rented space outside the home sooner. Having four people come to your basement makes the neighbors question what's going on. On the whole, I'm very pleased with how it's turned out.

We have a customer base of about 35,000 customers that we've built up over the years and we tell them what we've got that's new and that's how we can influence them and say this is what's what. We've got expertise in these products. We have engineers on staff that play with all the products — we tend not to sell anything unless we've played with it and it's passed our rigorous quality control testing. Some don't and we don't



Saelig Co. President Alan Lowne started the company in 1988 in a bedroom. Today it occupies 6,000 square feet of office and warehouse space in Perinton. MATTHEW DANEMAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

SAELIG CO.

Founded: 1988.

Location: 71 Perinton Parkway, Perinton.

Executives: CEO and founder Alan Lowne of Perinton.

Employees: 14.

Website: saelig.com.

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Click on this story at DemocratandChronicle.com to view a video about Saelig.

market them. The advantage we have is we can support all the products we sell. So we know what we're talking about. People will phone up and say, "I don't know what to buy, I don't know what oscilloscope I need, give me some advice." Our tech support manager will walk them through what their needs might be, guide them to the right product.

For overseas companies, that's very

valuable, the fact we do soup-to-nuts type marketing and press releases for our suppliers. And we do advertising, email blasts to our customer base. We act as an onshore office for the overseas companies. If we do too good a job, they'll say, "Oh, we will have an office over here, thank you very much for doing the groundwork for us."

Our favorite customer is a design engineer like I was at Kodak who wants to buy something and then keep buying them from a trusted channel. Maybe it's someone producing some medical equipment and they want a reliable controller that goes inside and they want to have a guaranteed source for five years, which is very difficult to get often, a guaranteed source. When I was working at Kodak and the medical equipment was sold off (to Johnson & Johnson), you had to specify one particular piece of equipment that went inside this medical product, which went through rigorous certification processes. If you changed anything, that certification process had to be redone, which was horrendously expen-

sive. We have customers from defense contractors, individual hobbyists, universities ... it's a broad spectrum. Twenty-four of 25 major defense contractors buy from us. Which is why our accountant is so amazed we're consistent from year to year in our slow and steady growth.

I don't have three- and five-year plans. Anybody who does, I think, is dreaming. I have a vision we can grow steadily. You can plot how we have grown and it's very linear ... based on the ever-increasing customer base. We continue to look for new and novel products and expand our product offerings. Possibilities arise. One Chinese scope manufacturer has offered that we become their master distributor. I'm not sure if it's going to come to fruition (but) that's a possible growth opportunity.

I'm very much of the mold that, give people a task and that's their job to do. We have one team meeting a week. I don't have individual meetings but once a

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year. It's more of a trust rather than a leadership-by-dictate mold here. I'll give you a poignant example of how that's played out. In 2006, my son was 26, was at Oxford University studying (and) contracted brain cancer. We dropped everything, my wife and I. In three hours we were on a plane for England. We stayed there for seven months while he eventually declined and died, and left the business in the hands of the folks here. And it grew while I was away. That's a testimony to the team we have here.

We started out as all members of the same church, Edgewood Free

Methodist Church in Brighton. They were the first hires except for the next-door neighbor's daughter, she's Catholic. Now we have a Muslim on staff, so we're not all Christians, but we all have a faith in doing the right thing. We're very much backed by prayer. It's not politically correct to say you pray for your customers and you pray for your suppliers and you pray through problems. "Saelig" is an old English word that means happy, prosperous and blessed. In the German Bibles, in the Beatitudes, where Jesus says blessed are the meek, blessed are the poor, the word is "saelig." (Pointing to the word "Hallelujah: tucked away in the company logo) Every product that goes out of here praises God.

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