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Spy vs spy

Johnson leads EDTS to record growth, tasked with sniffing out corporate mischief

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Cyber threats are real.

A plastics manufacturer serving the all-terrain vehicle industry discovered an ex-employee was logging into their system, changing prices and selling products for less than it costs to make them.

A recruiter of highly classified individuals for nuclear power plants found out they were hosting a pornographic site on their server.

And in Columbia, an IT administrator was exposed for hosting a sadomasochism and bondage paraphernalia website via the corporate computer.

"He was using their bandwidth and Internet and taking credit cards," said Charles Johnson, president and CEO of EDTS LLC, which revealed all these secrets.

In a tough economy, corporate espionage is magnified. Every client counts. Competitors will try to access client information, bribe salespeople and hack another company's network.

And that's where a company like EDTS comes in, specializing in networking, security and managed IT services. The company recently made Inc. magazine's 5000 list, an annual ranking of top U.S. private companies based on three years of growth.

"This was our first time being on that list," Johnson said. "We grew through necessity. We've marketed and positioned ourselves in the right areas."

Johnson grew up in Augusta, Ga., and coming out of college he became a network administrator for a home health care company. Pressured by his father to put his "finance degree to work," he joined Wade & Co. in 1995.

"I did 40-plus tax returns that year and I realized it wasn't for me," he said, and so he became Wade's senior network consultant.



Photo by Francis B. Allgood

Greenville-based Elliott Davis LLC would later acquire Wade & Co., and Johnson and Elliott Davis became joint shareholders in Elliott Davis Technology Solutions LLC, providing accounting and network systems. The accounting system practice, led by Tim Baker, was spun out as Baker Consulting LLC and was later acquired by Blytheco LLC in 2008.

On Jan. 1, 2009, Johnson bought out Elliott Davis' interest in EDTS. The acronym remains, but the name has a new meaning – experience, dedication, technology and solutions.

The company has 25 employees and is headquartered in Augusta. There are four engineers in the Greenville office inside the Dataworks building on Pleasantburg Drive.

"This market is a huge opportunity for us," Johnson said. "We've got a lot of clients up here. We've recently had a spike in business so we're actually looking to add engineers up here."

Some of that spike is due to increased regulations. The Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 dramatically reformed the accounting profession, and new rules have been introduced under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. The Payment Card Industry Security Standards Council is also developing new standards.

"Would you go to a doctor that didn't have a formal education," Johnson asked. "A lot of people are installing firewalls and doing security and they have no formal training whatsoever. They read a manual and throw it out there."

What's led to EDTS' success is its focus on infrastructure and security – not accounting or phone systems or custom website development.

"We don't pick it up unless we thoroughly understand it," he added. "I've had plenty of opportunities over the years just to make a dollar and that's not what we are about."

The technology is becoming pretty remarkable. Biometrics, such as the use of a fingerprint, is being used to identify computer use. EDTS is currently testing a new piece of security software that recognizes the speed, pressure and stroke one uses when typing their password – making it painstakingly difficult to duplicate.

"Everyone's typing characteristics are different," Johnson said.

EDTS has actually steered some clients who need disaster protection toward Immedion LLC or Integral Solutions Group, owners of new data centers in Greenville and Spartanburg, respectively. Sometimes EDTS will even manage the network inside the data center. But what Johnson has been impressed with the most recently has been business continuity technology.

No more tape drives. With today's technology, a unit can take an image of the servers up to every 15 minutes, and duplicate it on the East and West coasts as backups.

"If that server fails right now, within 30 minutes I can take that latest image of it and virtualize it on that box," Johnson said. "You can still get your e-mail, your files and your accounting system." 85

Charles Johnson

Family: Joanne, wife; Evan, son; Emily, daughter

Favorite vacation spot: Edisto Island

Favorite vacation spot: Hilton Head

Hobbies: Hunting, salt water fishing, golf

Favorite quote: "Well done is better than well said." – Ben Franklin

Favorite music: Country

Education: BBA-Finance from Georgia Southern University

Favorite movie: Top Gun

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