



Photo by Michelle Bouvier

Wadood Ibrahim



Best in Business Practices 2006

Software Success

By Barbara Edie

From offering more efficient financial services in Luxembourg to the convenience of booking a campsite online in Manitoba, Winnipeg-based Protegra is helping companies around the globe grow and improve the way they do business.

Since 1998, The Protegra Technology Group has been developing business solutions and software systems for government organizations and local, national, and international clients in industries including financial services, agriculture, and healthcare.

From their Scurfield Boulevard offices in Winnipeg, Protegra's 45 software professionals are managing business systems for companies in Europe, Japan, the United States, and across Canada, according to CEO Wadood Ibrahim. "Seventy per cent of the company's revenue," he says, "is derived from outside the country."

In the boom-bust world of information technology, Protegra's proven experience, expanding global client base, and its own rapid growth speak to this made-in-Manitoba company's integrity and innovation. In a five-year period, Protegra Technology Group Inc. grew by 658 per cent and was ranked by *Profit* magazine as one of Canada's fastest growing companies in 2004 and 2005.

"Protegra means professionals with integrity," Ibrahim explains, and he attributes the company's success to its practice of

finding experienced, talented people.

"We are innovators in attracting and retaining good employees," he says, as well as retaining customers from around the globe. "To deliver a high-level of service you have to have the right people." Protegra employees must possess experience as well as the ability to work well as a team. "Employees are paramount at Protegra ... an even higher priority than finances and process. There is no hierarchy at Protegra," Ibrahim notes. Employees, executives, and administrative staff are valued and respected as equals.

The Protegra group operates with transparency — the company's goals, target revenues, and profits are posted on an internal website as well as discussed at monthly meetings.

Employees receive competitive compensation, financial bonuses when company profits allow, and opportunities to invest in Protegra shares. Just as Protegra's mandate helps other businesses grow, the company fosters career growth for its own employees.

With competent, motivated employees in place, Protegra can then focus on the customer. "The key to delivering valuable business solutions revolves around an organizational structure that places the client at the centre" Ibrahim emphasizes.

While Protegra's strategy focuses on process and non-traditional approaches to business problems, the real focus is on the client's

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Software Success

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business and its unique set of problems. "The true secret to our success is to become trusted advisors to our customers," Ibrahim explains.

Clients share their business processes, and Protegra incorporates the findings into IT solutions that move the company forward. "Predictable results plus innovative solutions is the key," Ibrahim says succinctly. For example, Protegra recently built an online reservation system for the Manitoba Campgrounds Association and had the service up and running within two and a half months of receiving the contract; campsite bookings have increased by 20 per cent. Not only did Protegra deliver, it delivered quickly. "Traditional processes can be slow," adds Ibrahim. "We apply a different approach that gets the customer what he wants faster."

In some cases, Protegra uses tools and techniques other than technology to solve specific business problems and streamline processes. For instance, Protegra delivers "innovation workshops" to executives that examine a corporation's strengths, weaknesses, and obstacles to growth. Executives are directed to focus on how they plan to expand, handle customers more efficiently, or improve services; Protegra then provides concrete ways to accomplish these goals. The solution may be as simple as providing frontline workers with the information and systems to assist customers so they do not have to deal with two or three people to receive service.

"The customer always comes first ... even before work on internal projects," says Ibrahim. Customer satisfaction and a good experience with the project are critical. "IT projects are notorious for being over budget, behind schedule, and not delivering what the

customer wants," he adds. Eight years ago, from a 500 square-foot basement apartment on Pembina Highway, Ibrahim knew Protegra could do better, do it differently, and do it from Winnipeg.

With two other partners, Ibrahim founded the Protegra Technology Group at a time when the Year 2000 (Y2K) was on the horizon, dot.com businesses were popping up as fast as you could click here, and there was a huge demand for IT skills.

Yet many IT companies have crashed while Protegra continues to grow at high-speed. It now has almost 50 employees, clients on three continents, and a newly established Global Solution Centre that enables it to work directly with companies all over the world. Adds Ibrahim, "From a value perspective, Protegra hasn't changed. We continue to deliver valuable solutions, customer satisfaction, and a good experience for both the client and the employees."