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Perceiva joins JCC incubator

Communication technology firm is first client

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Monday June 26, 2006

Although its shiny new office will still only be occupied by a business manager, the James City County Technology Incubator has finally signed its first official client.

Perceiva, a provider of hosted and integrated communication solutions for small businesses, signed on earlier this month as a virtual client with the hope of using the incubator marketing and business tools to reach its target market.

President Greg Smith and Vice President Tom Vertetis founded Perceiva in Alexandria, and moved the company to Williamsburg after Smith was fed up with the D.C. commute.

Smith also chose to come here because of the increasingly thriving technology sector that is developing on the Peninsula, most recently sprouting in Williamsburg.

"James City County and HRTC have made this area attractive for tech companies," Smith said.

Perceiva specializes in integrated communications systems that will allow small business to have access to sophisticated services typically reserved for large companies. Using Perceiva's services, a small business can have a fully integrated telephone, groupware, and customer relations management system that can all be accessed at the office and through mobile devices via the same phone number.

For example, a single real estate agent can have a call routed from the office to a mobile device and when the call comes through, the customer's records pop up, similar to the function of caller ID.

But that is just one of the bells and whistles. Smith said Perceiva's system will allow a user to make a phone call simply by clicking on someone's e-mail address.

All a client needs is an Internet connection. Perceiva will implement voice over IP and the Internet to integrate all voice and data functions of an office including phone, fax, e-mail, instant messaging and customer management software. Acting as the host, Perceiva manages the servers that allow the technology to function, something a company cannot typically do without an IT staff on hand or spending at least tens of thousands for the infrastructure.

The idea was conceived when Smith was trying to install voice over IP at his brother's company.

"We started seeing all the possibilities that exist when you have voice and data coming from the line," he said.

Because Perceiva acts as the host, the costs to customers can be kept relatively low and although the final pricing structure has not yet been written in stone, Smith said Perceiva's services could be made available, for example, to a single real estate agent for about \$100 a month. The host also deals with any problems in the system, leaving the customer out of the mix.

"These are all the things a small business owner doesn't want to have to worry about."

Tim Early, director of the incubator, said Perceiva has found a niche in bringing these services to small businesses in an affordable manner. While these technologies exist on larger scales thanks to company such as Cisco, the initial capital costs to implement such systems do not make sense for the typical small business.

"Nobody that I know of is serving small businesses," Early said.

Smith said it amazes him when people realize these technologies are now available to everyone.

"They say 'Wow, I can do that?' That translates into real money for them."

Perceiva's services will officially be ready to launch in about 30 days, Smith said. For now, Smith and Vertetis will be the only employees.

"We're starting small and have made a conscious effort to work closely with businesses and not grow too quickly," Smith said.

Once it's completely ready for the public, Smith said aggressive marketing will begin. "If we have to we'll be going door to door."

Joining the incubator may help that effort in more ways than one. In addition to having access to marketing and networking tools provided by the incubator, Early said the incubator itself and its other clients are exactly the target market Perceiva is after.

Early used an analogy to explain the potential Perceiva's services have for small businesses. He compared it to the way a Web site has the capability of making a small company appear as large and sophisticated as the big players.

"This allows the small guy to compete," he said.

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