

Franchising virtual office proves to be intelligent move

Infrastructure provided, receptionist, meeting room without cost of overhead

BY KEELY BROWN

Business Report Correspondent

BOULDER — Ralph Gregory's formula for providing clients with a virtual office has led to fast-paced growth spurred on by franchising the concept.

Gregory founded Intelligent Office in 1995 and lined up its first franchise in 2000.

Right now the company has 32 franchises in 16 states, representing approximately 6,000 accounts. And Intelligent Office is opening up to the international market as well, with one branch already in Canada and three more being negotiated overseas.

The Intelligent Office has experienced an annual increase in revenue of 35 to 40 percent, most recently posting revenues of \$3.3 million in 2004 and \$4.9 million in 2005.

Gregory felt that because of the sophisticated level of services offered, his company would best serve the business world by becoming a franchise operation.

"It needed successful businesspeople who could 'talk the talk' and 'walk the walk,'" Gregory said. "The only business model that will give you ownership at that level is franchising."

Intelligent Office franchise owners undergo an intensive training program. After purchasing their franchise, they receive a 350-page operations manual and a series of training videos. After that, they are required to attend training classes in Boulder. Franchise owners also may avail themselves of full-time online or telephone technical support.

"What our franchisees enjoy is the security and confidence that anything they need to know will be immediately answered," said Gregory.

The company's home office remains in Boulder, where Gregory employs 16 people in dedicated offices as well as another 400 working in a remote capacity.

Because of its groundbreaking services, Gregory compares his business to the Internet of the early 1990s.

"Today I would doubt that even 1 or 2 percent of the business world knows that this new way to have an office even exists," he added. "But in three to five years, this will be common as dirt."

As founder and chief executive of Intelligent Office, Gregory will be the first to tell you that his company defies traditional definitions. "It's both our blessing and our curse," he admitted.

Intelligent Office uses the advancements in technology and telecommunications to revolutionize the traditional concept of



STEVE PETERSON

Ralph Gregory, founder and chief executive of Boulder-based Intelligent Office, has a team of executive receptionists such as Arlene Gonzalez, left, who use voice over Internet protocol to simultaneously work for multiple clients in various locations.

the business office, in terms of both space and services. The full-service company offers a broad range of business services to its clients, from "remote receptionist" and state-of-the-art telecommunications services to upscale temporary office space.

"We give people

the necessary elements of a traditional office, but we take out the unnecessary parts — and those account for about 80 percent of costs," Gregory said.

This full-service aspect helps Intelligent Office set itself apart from other business service providers.

"In the office world, there's nothing that can't be done at Intelligent Office in the sense of traditional office services," Gregory said. "Our clients see all the elements of a traditional office and pick out the pieces they need. And all of the communications can be made to be nongeographical, so the client can be mobile."

But while Intelligent Office releases clients from the ball and chain of having to be at their office at any particular moment, it also provides a physical infrastructure — which gives credibility to a business.

"You still need certain traditional elements to an office," Gregory explained. "You need an address. You need address services. You need professional meeting space. And you need a receptionist who can be your communications assistant, so you're not subject to the inefficiencies of a mom-and-pop organization."

Intelligent Office clients can maintain a virtual office by using the company's "remote receptionist" services. These receptionists perform all the services of a private business assistant, and are trained to consider themselves as staff members working for the client, not for an Intelligent Office franchise.

"We are not an answering service, and we are not a third-party relationship," Gregory emphasized. "For that phone call we are a member of the staff for that company. We are trained by you to do it your way, because we are a representative of your business."

Intelligent Office is revolutionizing the traditional executive suite as well. The company maintains a roster of upscale office spaces that clients can rent for varying lengths of time, depending on the client's needs.

Client pricing is based on use. In addition to basic services for which there are flat fees, Intelligent Office offers an "a la carte" listing of variable services at different levels, which allows clients to choose the services they most need and pay only for those selected.

For Gregory, the idea of maintaining a virtual office not only saves money, it also enables clients to make more room for their personal lives, saving time that would otherwise be spent in maintaining physical office space and staff.

"It's a realization of the American Dream," he said. "You can blend your business life and your personal life, because this empowers people to choose how and when and where they work."

Intelligent Office

4450 Arapahoe Ave.
Boulder, CO 80303
303-447-9000
Fax: 303-415-2500
www.intelligentoffice.com
Ralph Gregory, founder and CEO
Employees: 416
Primary Service: Virtual office, remote receptionist and other business services
Founded: 1995