

Offices a la carte



RALPH GREGORY HAS OWNED RADIO STATIONS IN THREE upper-Midwest states, owned a paging company licensed in nine states, and developed a natural-gas-fired co-generation plant in Michigan that he still counts as an active investment. In a rare non-entrepreneurial venture, the 62-year-old Gregory also once hosted a TV talk-show in Michigan called "Controversy and Consensus," for which he played the "everyman" while two opponents of a statewide issue squared off.

That barely scratches the surface of Gregory's interests over the years, but you get the idea.

"You hear the term 'serial entrepreneur,'" says Gregory, who moved from Michigan to Boulder in 1993. "Well, you're talking to the only real serial entrepreneur I've ever known."

That brings us to Gregory's most recent venture, Intelligent Office, a concept he started in Boulder in 1995 for professionals who only need an office once in a while to meet with clients, or only need a receptionist or a business mailing address to give the impression that they have an office.

**ON
SMALL BIZ,
BY MIKE
TAYLOR**

"Most people do it for the economics initially," Gregory says of Intelligent Office's clients. "They see that they can be very professional for a fraction of the cost."

There are other office-rental concepts out there, and Gregory takes a swipe at them even though he insists they aren't his competition.

"We're NOT a virtual office," he says. "There's a whiff of deception there, if you look up 'virtual' in the dictionary. We ARE your office. We're your business address, we're where you meet with clients, where your mail is picked up, where the receptionist answers your phone. We seamlessly connect you to your client, anywhere you are — on a yacht, skiing, laying on a beach in Hawaii.

Gregory is on a roll now, talking about how Intelligent Office, with the help of today's communications technology, is enabling humans to return to a more natural, liberated state.

"Three hundred years ago we were hunters and gatherers," he says, sitting in a room at one of his Intelligent Offices in the Denver Tech Center, one of three locations in the Denver area. "Then came the Industrial Revolution, and we had to go where the machines were. But in the last generation or so, technology has allowed our work life to become non-geographic. Intelligent Office gives you a brain that is a member of your staff for that one important phone call, relieving you from the tyranny of having to be in a specific place."

Gregory's concept is best illustrated by the 100 or so company names listed outside the door of Suite 150 at 4610


S. Ulster St. in the DTC. "That's about one-half of the clients that use this space," he says, pointing at the names. On this weekday morning, only about a half-dozen clients seem to be inside.

"We're the antichrist of the executive-suite industry," he says. "Ninety-five percent of our revenue comes from non-dedicated space. Ninety-seven percent of theirs comes from dedicated space."

Intelligent Office rents out office amenities *a la carte*, with a price list showing 82 different items, from mailboxes to receptionist service to office space to a company kitchen. "We nickel and dime you to death," Gregory says. "But we never charge you for anything you didn't use."

The genesis of Intelligent Office came when Gregory became a father for the first time at age 45. He was running a small venture-capital group and wanted to be home more with his daughter. He realized he really didn't need an office for much more than meeting with clients once in a while, or for having phone calls answered. He figured he wasn't alone.

After trying out a first branch of Intelligent Office in Boulder, Gregory opened a second office in Cherry Creek in 1998. Two years later he took Intelligent Office national, franchising the concept. There are now 25 locations nationwide, with another scheduled to open this month in Toronto. Last year, four years into the franchise concept, Intelligent Office generated revenues of \$15 million. "We're profitable and we have zero debt," Gregory says. "In five years this will be as common as dirt. Most of our clients are small businesses of 10 or fewer people. But this is going to percolate up through society."

Gregory may be right. But keep in mind this is coming from a serial entrepreneur and former TV talk-show host. 



Intelligent Office

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