

MAKING IT

Room for growth in the Big Apple

Glenwood Elam Jr. finds his place in the "Alley"

Considering the moniker of so many IT companies, you might assume that the "E" in Glenwood L. Elam Jr.'s company, Esystems Inc., stands for "electronic." Not so fast. At a time when dotcoms are crumbling due to conspicuously low levels of business acumen on the part of their founders, "the E" in Esystems epitomizes the high level of



Elam and Marcelin stake their claim in Silicon Alley.

service we strive to provide—excellent, exceptional, and extraordinary," states Elam. Since the company's inception in early 1998, Elam, along with business partner Carl-Stephan Marcelin, has committed to offering top-quality service for clients—the calling card of Elam's 15-year career in IT.

Elam decided to work as an employee before striking out on his own. "I have benefited tremendously from getting big company experience first," he says. He honed most of his expertise during an eight-year stint in the computer services division of Temple University, his undergraduate alma mater. He later went to Pennsylvania State University to earn a master's degree in management.

"Marcelin is the true techie, while I'm the administrator/manager type," says Elam of their complementary skills.

Between their personal savings and bank loans, the pair was able to start the company with approximately \$150,000 in capital.

But not everything would come so easily. It took them nearly a year to find suitable office space in Manhattan. "With all the burgeoning dotcoms in the area, it was extremely difficult to get the accommodations and facilities we needed," says Elam.

He and his partner looked at nearly 25 office spaces with the "help" of a realtor who seemed more interested in making a profit than finding suitable space.

Nine months later, "by a fluke," the realtor found an old building in Silicon Alley that was being renovated under Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's tax abatement program. "He said the space was affordable," recalls Elam, who ended up dishing out \$35 per sq. ft. for the 3,000-sq.-ft. space. Esystems' first-year profits were only \$50,000, less than half the cost of the yearly lease.

In 1999, Elam registered Esystems as a certified 8(a) company at the federal and state levels, and took advantage of a local business incubator in Manhattan. "I was able to share certain administrative and office equipment costs with several other small businesses," explains Elam. "So we could focus on our core business." It also reduced overhead by 50%. Elam said he received invaluable advice and business leads from his local Small Business Administration office.

Second-year revenues jumped to \$500,000 and the firm expects to finish out this year with over \$1 million in sales. A staff of 20 serves a client list including Utendahl Capital Partners, the Department of Defense, and Chase Manhattan Bank. Plans are under way to open an office in Washington, D.C.

—Robyn D. Clarke

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BY THE BOOK

Yes, you can

Just when you think you don't have what it takes to become a successful black female entrepreneur, Barbara A. Robinson says, "Yes, you can!" Robinson, born out of wedlock, a victim of childhood sexual abuse who was forced to leave her home at the age of 16, has proven her affirmation in her latest book, *Yes, You Can: How to Start, Operate, & Grow a Business While Developing Yourself and Pursuing Your Personal Goals* (APU Publishing Group, \$18).

Robinson, who is also the president and owner of Strategies, Tactics, and Results Associates Inc. (STAR Inc.), a human resources development and training firm based in Baltimore, says, "Without a well-planned strategy, you will ultimately fail in whatever you're pursuing. You must first be clear about the line of business you want to go into, research the industry, and develop a business plan."

Other important areas detailed in her book include: contact numbers and addresses to small business government agencies, grant funding sources, proposal writing publications, achieving personal and company goals, hiring and firing practices, personnel policy manuals, employee motivation enhancement, and the Success P-Principles (i.e., politeness, purpose, pride). Robinson, who holds a master's degree in criminal justice administration and a bachelor's degree in business administration, offers *Yes, You Can* as a powerful resource tool for entrepreneurs.

—Feona Huff

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How to Start, Operate
& Grow a Business While
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Pursuing Your Personal Goals

Barbara A. Robinson