

These engines of our domestic economy drive more than half the nation's gross domestic product and generate 60% of American jobs. There are 5.6 million of them in the U.S., a number that ramps higher every year. Even with so many of them among us, we all still want to know, "What's it like to work in a family business?" And the answer you get from Jim Silke, President of Silke Communications, is an immediate and enthusiastic "Working with family has been wonderful! I can't imagine a better scenario and wouldn't want to."

Jim Silke is the son of Jim Silke, Sr. and Carol Silke, who founded Silke Communications in 1964. Silke Communications is a Western Oregon based Kenwood two-way radio dealer, operating the Fleetnet™ voice and data radio system, Oregon Paging and offering tower leasing, GPS/AVL and microwave backhaul.

Maintaining a business for nearly 50 years is a remarkable achievement. Growing a business over that time period, in one of the most rapidly expanding segments of the economy – wireless communications – means there are solid commitments in place to guide that expansion. Silke names three of the company's major commitments that have maintained continuity and led to growth. One is infrastructure ownership. As Jim points out "We own all aspects of our provided services wherever possible. This allows Silke to control the costs of providing new services to our customers." Silke Communications has always maintained outside sales resources to "cause our business to grow instead of waiting and wishing for it to grow. The lack of outward focus in two-way is almost a religion in some circles. Waiting for business to come to the front door instead of going to its front door and asking for an opportunity still amazes me." Their third key to success is a commitment to customer satisfaction, which Jim states as "Silke Communications will always do what is right for the customer. Always."

The rapid expansion of wireless has led to opportunities for Silke Communications, opportunities that Jim sees as open to all dealers, when he observes, "Two-way radio has become very complacent in some areas. It's surprising that with the last decade of rapid communications adoption by the general public that the two-way vendor community has not embraced the trails that the large carriers have blazed for us."

One of the opportunities Silke Communications has embraced is in packaging services. "The top 2% of companies in almost every category use services available from communications services companies like Silke's. They understand the value we offer. Packaging sells and very little industry specific service offer packaging exists. We productized many of our offerings in a way that a customer can easily understand them. They don't automatically understand our offerings. They don't care what mountain they are repeating off. Take a look at our Fleetnet brochure (<http://www.silkecom.com/resources/downloads>) and, as

an example, it's easy to read and understand. In the past, we would have discussed the multiple mountain tops that the system used and assumed our customers understood where they served. Since introducing the Fleetnet sales tool, our loading has increased every month and we're adding capacity as fast as we can," Jim stated.

Early last year, Silke spent some time exploring their operational model and decided to, as Jim states it, "Change everything." They examined their strategies for doing business, the competitive landscape, their service portfolio and what Jim calls "the pure nature of our customer blends." To those aspects of the business, they added their customer retention model. They did all of this because they saw their business achieving a somewhat level platform and although there was risk involved in redesigning their team, once that was clearly communicated to their customer base, the pay-off has been significant.

Once their operational model was realigned, Silke Communications revamped their marketing image and materials and they are "looking for opportunistic growth opportunities moving forward. These will be in the geography that our multiple wide area trunking networks serve and our common use facilities occupy," according to Jim. "We're in a definitive growth mode and will not turn down any reasonable business opportunities that we uncover."

Those with a sense of history in a business usually have the best advice for those now entering the business for the first time. For those newcomers, Jim has this to say, "Pick a vertical market segment and do it really well. Don't try to be everything to everybody which is quite common in our business. I would also suggest that it's far better to 'partner' with a company like Silke Communications that has all of the infrastructure and facilities in place to support a growth minded individual or company instead of going head to head. There is quite enough opportunity in the industry and local business communities for all that want to responsibly participate."

