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# FASTEST GROWING COMPANIES

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Dennis Abrahams and David Lowman

# FAST TRACKS

SageQuest has grown quickly by making the most of its GPS technology and the efficiencies it creates for mobile fleets. By Matt Tullis

## SAGEQUEST

Launched: 2003

Location: Beachwood

Founders: Mark and Gary Mintz

Growth Percentage 2004-2008: 1,474%



**Don't call SageQuest a tech company.** At least not in the presence of Dennis Abrahams or David Lowman, the company's two highest executives.

Sure, SageQuest sells a GPS tracking system to local businesses and companies that have mobile fleets — be they plumbers or drywallers, cable installers or laundry deliverers — but Abrahams and Lowman insist they aren't selling technology as much as the means to use that technology efficiently.

"The technology is very simple," says Lowman, SageQuest executive vice president and CFO. "The real special sauce, the value we add, is that we take that data and present it in ways to the customer that really help them improve the performance of their mobile resources.

"There is lots of data out there but too little information," he continues.

"We think of ourselves as an information company."

That information, culled from tens of thousands of data points collected by that GPS technology, allows companies with mobile fleets to track their drivers on a real-time basis.

Dispatchers can find out which drivers are closest to a new or emergency service call. Operations managers can identify where there are exceptions to regular activity (such as one specific vehicle staying at a location longer than it should). And CEOs can see whether the company is hitting goals for average number of stops per day, travel time and just about any other piece of information one can imagine.

With more than 20 million vehicles working in the local service market that SageQuest serves, there has been

room for growth. Currently these GPS tracking systems penetrate between 10 to 15 percent of those vehicles. Lowman estimates that penetration should reach 30 percent.

That spells more room for growth, even in a down economy.



"We're not completely immune," Lowman says, "but we will grow this year."

Lowman and Abrahams are no strangers to high-growth startups. They worked together three times before SageQuest, all at relatively new, high-growth companies.

The first time, Abrahams, president and CEO of SageQuest, hired Lowman to work in product management at Victoria Financial Corp., a small, private automobile insurance company competing against the likes of Progressive Insurance.

Lowman had just shut down the Cleveland Brewing Co., which he had started after graduating from the Kellogg School of Management in Chicago. "It didn't work, probably for a number of reasons," Lowman says. "But it was the best learning experience of my life."

Abrahams liked Lowman's background, especially the fact that he wasn't an insurance guy. "I like people with eclectic backgrounds," Abrahams says. "I just thought he was a cool guy. I hired him because I didn't want to hire an insurance guy."

Actually, there's more to it than that. "We've got very complementary skills and strengths," Abrahams says. "Dave has tremendous visions; he's financially astute. Dave has charisma and tact. With me, I'm a people person, an organization and development guy. I'm smart enough to know what I don't know."

Abrahams himself has quite an eclectic background. He admits he's not your typical CEO.

"My first love was teaching and working with people," he says. "I had a very altruistic view of the world. I wanted to join the Peace Corps. Everything about me was in some way anti-business."

Abrahams' academic degrees are in communications. He was a baseball coach at West Jefferson High School in central Ohio and a high school teacher for several years before going to grad school.

Then, at a conference in Chicago, he found himself talking with folks from Progressive Insurance. Before he knew it, he had a job offer. The company wanted him to work with people and process issues, he says, which was right down his alley.

Whatever their backgrounds, Abrahams and Lowman have made a great team at SageQuest.

The first thing Abrahams and Lowman did when they took leadership positions with the company that would become SageQuest was shut down sales.

The company had about 40 clients who were using early GPS technology to monitor mobile fleets, and the return on those clients' investment had been met in mere months.

Still, they shut sales down, a move they credit much of the company's success to today.

"We didn't focus on the revenue side in those first 12 months," Abrahams says. "We focused on creating a product that would sell and creating a foundation of staff and skills. And most of the team that we had at the beginning is still here."

In 2005, SageQuest ramped up its marketing and sales machine.

"Since then, it has been a great ride," Lowman says, noting that the company has grown 80 to 100 percent every year since 2005.

The core part of SageQuest's business has long been small, local mobile fleets, but now the company is also exploring growth opportunities for its enterprise market, which is made up of large, household, name-brand companies (think big utilities and communication companies).

What started with a dozen employees now has about 80, and Lowman says they continue to bring on new people and will likely soon hit 100 employees.

"We're bringing really good talent into this organization," Lowman says. "There's never been a better time to find real quality people for any position, and we're taking advantage of that."

To make sure those employees stick around, the company has started SageQuest University. Employees will be able to take classes focusing on SageQuest business and social issues, as well as health and wellness issues.

Aside from keeping employees educated, Lowman says SageQuest also shoots to keep them happy.

Since 2004, the company has always had a large break room with plenty of activities for employees, including pingpong and foosball.

"When you're growing, you are under the gun quite a bit," Lowman says. "Just having the opportunity between those fires that you're putting out, to run down there and beat someone up on the foosball table, is just great. It builds teamwork and camaraderie."

Lowman says the nature of the job often requires extraordinary effort from employees.

"We couldn't be more thrilled with our people," he says.



## DENNIS ABRAHAMS

President and CEO of SageQuest

- ⊙ **There is a fine line** between success and failure. Nobody guarantees success.
- ⊙ **If you don't run the risk of failure**, there's a high likelihood that you won't be successful.
- ⊙ **Being able to work** with people is one of the most underrated aspects of business leadership. You can have all the academic credentials in the world, but if you can't work effectively with people and put the needs of your staff and customers ahead of your own personal preferences, then you're not going to succeed.
- ⊙ **I've always** had a love for communication and team building.
- ⊙ **My first real experience** with this came as a high school baseball coach. I learned you could take decent talent and create an exceptional team just by listening and working as a unit and persistently working to be better.
- ⊙ **If you have a great strategic concept** but you can't implement it, you're not going to be successful. If you have great operational skills but you don't understand how to create strategies that work in the marketplace, you're not going to be successful. A lot of companies fail because they lack one or both of those qualities.
- ⊙ **SageQuest** has succeeded because we roll with the punches.
- ⊙ **We know we can't be everything to all people**, so we focus on the one or two things we can do better than everyone else. And we do them exceptionally well.

# THE WEATHERHEAD 100



The Weatherhead 100 identifies the 100 top-growth companies in Northeast Ohio based on sales from 2004 through 2008. Companies on this list must have had sales of more than \$100,000 in 2004 and more than \$1 million in 2008. In addition, the companies on this list must have had a minimum of 16 full-time employees in 2008.

	COMPANY	CITY	WEB SITE	FOUNDED	SALES GROWTH '04-'08	# OF EMPLOYEES	EMPLOYEE GROWTH '04-'08
1	<b>SageQuest LLC</b>	Solon	sage-quest.com	2003	1,474%	50 - 249	253%
	SageQuest provides GPS vehicle-tracking solutions to improve the efficiency and productivity of mobile work forces.						
2	<b>Turning Technologies LLC</b>	Youngstown	turningtechnologies.com	2002	983%	50 - 249	742%
	Turning Technologies develops interactive response systems for the K-12, higher education and professional markets.						
3	<b>E-merging Technologies Group</b>	Cleveland	e-mergingtechnologies.com	1999	855%	50 - 249	1,300%
	Professional services firm serving the National Defense Agencies; the intelligence community; state, local governments; and private sector companies.						
4	<b>Longbow Research LLC</b>	Seven Hills	longbowresearch.com	2003	829%	50 - 249	162%
	Longbow Research provides investment research to institutional investors with a focus on mid- and large-cap equities.						
5	<b>Military Products Group Inc.</b>	N. Ridgeville	militaryproducts.com	2001	735%	50 - 249	920%
	Manufacturer of hardware products used to secure, lift and tow military transport equipment and cargo.						
6	<b>Perceptis LLC</b>	Cleveland	perceptis.com	2004	705%	50 - 249	205%
	Perceptis provides a unified customer service center, helpdesk and business intelligence to higher education, driving continuous improvement.						
7	<b>SecureState LLC</b>	Cleveland	securestate.com	2001	629%	16 - 49	121%
	SecureState helps its clients obtain and maintain their desired state of security through audit and compliance, attack and penetration tests, data forensics, and security program building.						
8	<b>Expert Construction Inc.</b>	Cleveland	expertconstructioninc.com	1999	575%	16 - 49	567%
	A premier commercial carpentry firm specializing in metal studs, drywall and acoustical ceilings.						
9	<b>Tooling University</b>	Cleveland	toolingu.com	2002	473%	16 - 49	190%
	Tooling University trains individuals in manufacturing and education on manufacturing subjects using integrated online learning tools.						
10	<b>FIT Resources</b>	Cleveland	FITtechnologies.com	1999	465%	50 - 249	257%
	FIT Resources is three companies: SchoolOne and Campus Outfitters support K-12 schools; FIT Technologies provides managed IT to corporations.						
11	<b>E2B Teknologies, Inc.</b>	Chardon	e2btek.com	2001	441%	16 - 49	329%
	E2B Teknologies is an authorized reseller of Enterprise Resources Planning (ERP) for Sage and Epicor.						
12	<b>Knotice</b>	Akron	knotice.com	2003	415%	16 - 49	357%
	Knotice maximizes the return on investment of direct digital marketing through process automation, increased relevance and improved performance.						
13	<b>Hurricane Labs LLC</b>	Independence	hurricanelabs.com	2004	383%	16 - 49	325%
	IT managers and CIOs trust Hurricane Labs to oversee their IT security, thereby reducing risk and saving money.						
14	<b>Forest City Erectors Inc.</b>	Twinsburg	forestcityerectors.com	1960	368%	50 - 249	170%
	Forest City Erectors specializes in structural steel erection, tower crane installs and blast furnace rebuilds.						
15	<b>Enger Tire Centers</b>	Mentor	enger-tire.com	1995	347%	50 - 249	131%
	Tire and auto repair business in Northeast Ohio.						
16	<b>SS&amp;G Healthcare Services LLC</b>	Akron	SSandG.com	1999	345%	50 - 249	405%
	SS&G Healthcare Services specializes in outsourced practice management services, medical billing and physician consulting.						