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Proper placement: Hard work, reinvestments in personnel are key to recruiting firm's strategy

Boston Business Journal - by [Sean McFadden](#)

Brian Tomasello isn't afraid to take a risk.

"I believe you have to take risks in order to succeed," said Tomasello, 35. "These should not be rash, careless risks. Instead, they should be well thought out and calculated."

With that in mind, he left the security of a large staffing firm to start his own business, Boston-based IT recruiting firm **AVID Technical Resources**, back in 2003.

Today, the 24-employee firm he co-founded with John-Paul Treacy has steadily increased its revenue — going from \$9.3 million in 2008 to \$9.6 million in 2009 and projections of \$10.5 million this year. About 75 percent of its revenue is coming from contract temporary placement, though the firm also provides permanent placement and executive recruiting. Two of the key areas it provides talent for are applications development and infrastructure support.

One factor in its continued growth may be a calculated risk AVID (an acronym for Applications. Voice. Internet. Data.) took in early 2009: As the recession was taking a toll on the staffing industry, the company decided to actually add three new salespeople — at a cumulative investment of around \$200,000.

"We went on a hiring blitz in the eye of the storm," said Tomasello. "In order to fight our way through an economic downturn, we needed more salespeople to find what business was still out there."

The "hiring blitz" has continued in 2010, with AVID adding 12 more staff — seven recruiters, two more salespeople, one interactive marketing manager, a director of business operations and a manager of branch recruiting.

Those last two hires are particularly key, as AVID has plans to expand nationally next year: The firm, which has a second office in Marlborough, is looking to add at least three more regional offices — most likely in Providence, Philadelphia and Raleigh, N.C.

The management additions will enable Tomasello and Treacy to be closely involved in ensuring the expansion process goes smoothly. Previously, AVID closed two other offices — one in Columbus, Ohio, and the other in Nashua, N.H. — in 2007 and 2009, respectively. Tomasello said the office in Nashua was closed largely due to the recession, while the one in Columbus suffered from management issues.

"Moving forward, either John-Paul or myself will physically work in every new office we open to train, mentor, and develop the employee starting the office to provide them with our full attention and best chance of success," Tomasello said.

Fielding the best team possible has, in fact, been an ongoing priority for AVID. "Never stop interviewing. You never know if someone is a fit now or in the future," Tomasello said.

Bob Siemering, president of the **Massachusetts Staffing Association**, said he considers reinvestment in staffing to be a key strategy of successful firms: "At the end of the day, it's a service business. And, the only way you can deliver that service is having the internal staff to execute on it."

In an effort to better attract and retain talent, Tomasello said AVID has implemented such incentives as an "aggressive" commission structure, an annual bonus of \$10,000 for salespeople or recruiters who hit their goals, and a stock-like program for its employees that provides additional compensation and ties them into the company's overall growth.

In a competitive marketplace, maintaining a strong work ethic has been a cornerstone of the firm's strategy — particularly these days.

"I remember having an office meeting and saying, 'To fight our way through this recession, we need to work harder now than we ever have in our lives,'" Tomasello said. "We can't control the economy, we can only control how hard we work."

Furthermore, he said, "There could be a silver lining to this terrible recession — when other (companies) take their foot off the gas, we can steam forward and build our business."

Glenn O'Neil, director of recruiting at AVID client **NaviSite** in Andover, said, "The breadth of what they do is right in the sweet spot of technology concerns. And, they've always sent us good, quality people. ... The performance level they've set for themselves is extremely high."



W. Marc Bernsau
 John-Paul Treacy, left,
 and Brian Tomasello
 have added 12 more
 staffers to the payroll
 this year.

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Tomasello launched AVID (then known as AVID Staffing) following a six-year run with a local office of technology staffing and services firm **TEKsystems Inc.** Tomasello said he was careful to wait out the dot-com collapse of 2001/2002. He self-funded AVID with about \$27,600 to get started.

"I had been successful at the other firm, so I was confident that I could do this on my own," Tomasello said.

Shortly after launching AVID, Tomasello was joined by Treacy, an industry colleague, as a co-owner of the business. Tomasello said he and Treacy worked long hours — often going from 7:30 a.m. to midnight, with a break in between — to build the business.

In 2007, after years of leasing space, AVID made another leap and purchased an approximately 4,000-square-foot office condo at 185 Devonshire St. in Boston for more than \$1 million. That move, Tomasello said, paid off in that it has actually helped the firm save money in the long run, while enabling it to build equity.

The company has tried to look ahead in other areas: It launched a health care IT division in 2007, as buzz around electronic medical records began to grow. Other key vertical industries for which AVID is providing IT talent are financial services and technology.

Tomasello said AVID has also invested thousands of dollars in interactive marketing strategies over the past few years and has long embraced social media tools, such as Facebook and Twitter. "I think we've done a very good job of being forward-thinking and dynamic instead of remaining stagnant," he said.

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