

Making the Right Connection

One small business blossoms with help from a telecommunications leader

Eastern Connection began life as a delivery service on Valentine's Day, 1983, with two rented pick-up trucks, eight clients, and 18 packages. The brainchild of founders James Berluti and Ted Kauffman, this was a small company with a specific goal: to ship packages overnight throughout the Northeast region and deliver them earlier than the competition.

Now, two decades later, the Woburn-based company is the largest regional business-to-business parcel carrier on the East Coast. They provide service to more than 5,000 cities from Maine to Virginia, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Since the company relies heavily on ground transportation, they are able to offer later pick-ups and earlier deliveries than companies that ship by air.

Such flexibility is one reason Eastern Connection has succeeded. But there's another reason: the assistance of a telecommunications firm that has helped them cut costs and keep track of their workforce.

"You have to understand that we have a fleet of 400 couriers across the Northeast," says John Maguire, Vice President of Operations. "The better we can connect with our people,

the more efficiently we can serve our customers."

A vital partnership

When Eastern Connection began, communication was limited to landlines, fax machines and pagers, all of which now seem as archaic as the telegraph. Today's wireless communications have proved much more efficient. But unlike their larger competitors, such as FedEx or UPS, Eastern Connection wasn't big enough to mastermind its own system.

Instead, they turned for help to Nextel Communications, a leading provider of fully integrated, wireless communications services. "Even though we're a small business, because of Nextel we've been able to keep pace with the competition," says Maguire.

"The key to success has been partnering with a large communications company."

New technologies

Nextel introduced Eastern Connection to its Direct Connect system, digital



walkie-talkies that allow employees to communicate without placing a phone call. More recently, Nextel has developed a system that can scan packages, read bar codes, and automatically transmit data, all using a single wireless phone system.

"When we used to deliver a package," says Maguire, "our employees would have to call in and confirm delivery to someone who was manning our phone lines around the clock. Now, the entire process can be accomplished digitally, using computers, without the human error of transposed numbers or misread information. It saves us huge amounts in time and manpower."

Keeping promises

Efficiency like this is what has enabled Eastern Connection to deliver vital organs and medical supplies

to hospitals, legal briefs to law firms, and crucial parts to manufacturers without missing its promised arrival times.

With their eye on the small business customer, Nextel has also developed a GPS wireless tracking system that, in real-time, can track all field personnel and route vehicles from any desktop PC.

In addition, small business clients, such as pizza delivery services, can swipe customer credit cards on cellular phones and gain authorization before the pizza gets cold.

"For us," says Maguire, "the key to success has been partnering with a large communications company that has provided us with all the resources a small company like ours can't provide on our own."