

## Firms Grow By Capitalizing on Technological Advances

**STRATEGY: Companies adapt their businesses so they embrace constant change.**

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By Mark Madler

For decades the fire prevention message of Smokey Bear has been a staple of posters, billboards and television commercials.

Changing times call for new methods to reach an audience and so Smokey has joined the millions using Facebook and Twitter.

Animax Entertainment in Van Nuys has been working on the Smokey Bear social media campaign with the Ad Council, going after a generation more likely to punch a keypad on their mobile device rather than sit in front of the television or list to the radio.

The campaign also allows for the interaction that online users have embraced and that makes the experience more relevant.

“Folks are interacting more, and that is everything from a Facebook profile to a Twitter account,” said Animax President Michael Bellavia. “It reinforces (the fire prevention message) when they take an initiative to go to those sites.”

The viral worlds, online games, Facebook pages that Animax Entertainment creates would be nothing without the technology behind it.

This year’s Fast Growing Private Companies list includes a number of businesses that have tied themselves to recent technological advances and can point to those ties as a reason for their growth.

In addition to Animax, there is GoTV Networks in Sherman Oaks, which makes and distributes content for mobile devices, and Blue Microphones, manufacturer of microphones for the iPod and iPhone. Even Canon Recruiting Group uses web spiders and web crawlers to search the Internet for job seekers beyond the typical job posting sites.

These businesses differ from the pure technology firms on the list in that they fall into other industry categories and use the technology as a means to do and grow their business. As the technology improves, these companies then adapt to the changes.

When Animax Entertainment started in 2001, there was no such thing as a Twitter account or a Facebook page.

“For us we have always been tool agnostic and these social media platforms are just a tool,” Bellavia said.

### **Following innovations**

Blue Microphones was also around prior to the tech innovations that have been behind its growth and resulted in the Westlake Village-company forming a consumer products division that has become the main revenue generator.

“The consumer side is bigger than the pro side but the pro is what got us here and we do not want to lose sight of that,” said CEO John Maier.

As the developer and manufacturer of high-end microphones, the first bow to technology was recognizing that recording techniques had shifted away from analogue to digital. Blue’s philosophy became how to get the best of an old-fashioned sound with digital technology, Maier said.

### **Carving a niche**

The next step was developing microphones that could connect into a USB port of a personal computer. With the Yeti, Snowball and Snowflake, Blue Microphones used the USB connection as a way to carve out a spot in the market.

In 2001, Apple introduced its first iPod, the now ubiquitous portable music player that presented yet another new market for Blue Microphones. While the size and storage capacity of the iPod has changed what hasn’t is the 30-pin connector that allows for USB devices to be attached.

The Mikey was Blue’s contribution to using the iPod although Maier said many people who own the device are unaware it can record as well as playback audio. It can be used for live music, lectures, dictation and interviews. The Blue FiRe field recording app was released by the company in 2009.

Blue has gotten in on the ground floor of developing microphones to use with the popular Flip video camera. The Mikey for Flip will be officially launched and at the Consumer Electronic Show in January and begin shipping afterward.

“We got excited about it and thought we could take some concepts for Apple and bring those to Flip,” Maier said.