

Filling the information gap >

Executive Summary:

Finding crucial competitive information is easy. It's the using of it that presents a problem, unless you're an expert. Here's the expert.

By Rachael Garrity

Operating a small or medium-sized business takes talent, toughness and more than a modicum of hard work in the best of markets. When the economic environment is as volatile as it is today, even a generous helping of all three may not be enough without the competitive edge born of information that is comprehensive and reliable:

- Who are your major competitors?
- Your potential clients or markets?

- How about sources of investment capital or partners?
- Attractive new lines of business?
- Promising technological advances? Trends to track?
- Challenges to keep an eye on?

Accurate competitive intelligence is obviously the answer, but one that has not always been accessible or affordable—or both—to those without large budgets. Enter Attaain Inc., a Blacksburg-based online service that offers information that is available all day, every day, constantly updated and provided in a form that allows for real-time collaboration among all levels of management, wherever they operate.

Daryl Scott, founder and owner of the business, moved to Blacksburg in 2001 from Silicon Valley, where he had worked as a consultant and CEO of venture-backed companies.

With nearly a dozen years of experience working in advertising, marketing and media analysis in New York prior to his time in California, Scott had developed a robust



I've seen what finding and using just one really good piece of information can mean. It's exciting to be able to deliver it to multiple people in multiple offices in real time.

—Daryl Scott



Daryl Scott

Dan Smith

understanding of what kinds of information lay at the heart of a competitive advantage.

"Not all that long ago, the issue was finding accurate information," explains Scott. "Today it is just as much about coping with the information available and applying it in ways that work best."

He established Attaain a year ago, and smilingly notes it is "a blessing and a curse" that the service is useful to virtually every kind of business operation—technology, defense contracting, manufacturing, publishing, marketing, advertising, and pharmaceuticals, to name a few. And while the information Attaain provides is assuredly not useful only to small and medium enterprises, it is structured to be affordable for the full range of corporations.

"When a company needs information delivered throughout the year to more than one user, it typically chooses what we call our 'Enterprise Model,'" says Scott. "Others may find it more cost effective to subscribe on a per user basis with a monthly fee. Either way, they are able to create a portal that is customized to their specific interests, markets and operations."

Where does the information come from? Essentially everywhere. Traditional sources of competitive intelligence, business and general media, blogs, the works. Scott uses contractors for his own business operations, and has created an exchange with other online sources of information.

"There is a huge, untapped opportunity for this kind of service," Scott argues. "I've seen what finding and using just one really good piece of information can mean. It's exciting to be able to deliver it to multiple people in multiple offices in real time. No longer are data mining and knowledge management the province of the large-scale operation only. The net result is success for all kinds of companies and their customers." 