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D.A. Smith and Associates CEO says people still key to success

In 2010, businesses have more tools than ever. But the key to success still lies where it did when commerce began, says Delmonize Smith, president and CEO of D.A. Smith and Associates. With the people. "No matter how great the technology is or the business process is, if people aren't on board, the business will fail."

It's no good, for example, to spend millions on high-end enterprise resource planning software — software intended to help manage a business' information and functions — if employees don't understand how to input data in the right places or find data to produce needed reports.

Smith's company, founded in 2008, exists to bridge these types of gaps between people, business processes and technology.

The company is based at the Rochester Institute of Technology's Venture Creations business incubator in Henrietta and offers a variety of human resources and information technology services, including telecommunications, information security, information management and organizational development and change management services.

Last year the company did a technology audit for the International Finance and Economic Development High School at Franklin and found, for example, that some teachers were using their SMART interactive whiteboards only to display PowerPoint slides

D.A. Smith and Associates, which is the school's partner through the Rochester School District's PENCIL Partnership Program, recommended that teachers make better use of the whiteboards' interactivity features. They could, for example, give quizzes and allow each student to input his or her answers using a SMART board-compatible clicker. Teachers could then see an instant tally of what percentage of students provide which answer. If a large group of students chooses the same incorrect answer, a teacher knows some explanation is needed.

"They can see how the material is sitting with the students," said Torry Butler, a D.A. Smith IT business analyst who worked on the audit. D.A. Smith and Associates has four employees and also contracts with consultants.

Butler also suggested that the school should invest in Web-conferencing software that would allow teachers to record their lectures and broadcast them online. Students who were ill could follow along at home and students who just wanted to brush up on a lesson could access lectures in an online archive.

Sometimes the expertise D.A. Smith and Associates offers is high tech. Sometimes it isn't.

Randy Henderson, president of Henderson Automotive, said that a retreat that D.A. Smith and Associates ran for his managers included a game of telephone. To his surprise, the managers didn't fare well at this children's activity where a message is whispered from person to person.

"With a group of pretty well-trained management-level adults, about half of the message got through the end," Henderson said.

He said the retreat provided a variety of techniques for improving inter- and intra-office communication, including a technology-based method for non-managers to provide suggestions and feedback.

Ali Abdulmateen, principal of the International Finance and Economic Development High School at Franklin, said Smith's value to his school goes beyond the services his company provides.

"He comes from the same kind of experience that many of our kids come from. He's an African-American male and he's a Ph.D. A guy like him, who really has high standards, is the kind of person we want to continually put in front of our kids."

Smith agrees that it's important for African Americans to have more role models in the business world. "The best way to learn something is by doing or by watching others," he said.

Though numbers are increasing, there isn't a critical mass of entrepreneurs of color in high-growth areas like technology, he said.

An engineer by trade, Smith is also currently an assistant professor of management at RIT's Saunders College of Business, where he teaches courses on entrepreneurship and organizational behavior.

His current research focuses on what it takes for companies to land on the *Black Enterprise* 100 list, the magazine's annual list of the largest African-American-owned companies in the United States. "I'm trying to do the research on it and be one at the same time," he said.

