




CEO James Essey says strength and flexibility give this staffing company an edge over the competition.

TemPositions

Lining Up



Before James Essey joined the company that his father, Richard, started in 1962, he spent some time at Clairol, learning how large companies manage and market multiple brands.

Those years have proved invaluable. Since coming onboard in the mid 1980s, the younger Essey has grown TemPositions from a primarily clerical staffing company into a group of niche companies that serve the staffing needs of multiple disciplines—from general office to healthcare professionals, executives, attorneys, and senior financial personnel.

“I think it was a smart move on our part,” said James Essey, now president and CEO of TemPositions Group of Companies, based in New York City. “National companies were coming into the market and focusing solely on office clerical. I saw the writing on the wall; if we were to compete with them in just one area, they could out-advertise us. So I said, we’re going to kill them on customer service, convenience, and expertise.”

Based on his observations of the organizational structure at Clairol, Essey structured TemPositions as a group of related companies, each with its own staffing expertise. The move strengthened the company and helped it develop a reputation as a regional leader in specialty staffing markets.

“It made us recession proof. When there was a weakness in the economy or a lot of labor

around in one segment, chances are something else is booming,” he said. “Even today, when you have a specialized staffing need, you don’t look to a national company.”

Single point of contact

Essey said TemPositions, which has grown over the years both organically and through acquisitions, is at the perfect size. With 21 profit centers placing 1,000 to 1,200 people a week in openings in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and California, the company is just big enough to have the resources to meet clients’ needs but not so big it can’t provide high-level customer service.

“We’re big enough to afford people on staff who can develop solutions for our clients but not too big to not want to do that for our clients,” Essey said.

Although clients are assigned a representative to be their single point of contact, behind the scenes, several companies are actually working for them. Depending on need, the representative might reach out to practice managers at CompuForce, the information technology division; The Desktop Group/Creative Bureau for design, marketing and communications specialists; AcctPositions for accounting and finance personnel; On Call Counsel or TemPositions Legal for attorneys, paralegals or legal support; TemPositions Health Care and Enriched Living for healthcare personnel and in-home companions; TemPositions Eden

Hospitality for dining and special events; or even School Professionals for education experts, in addition to office clerical staffing through TemPositions.

"We emphasize 'one person, one phone call,' so whoever their representative is, it's their responsibility to reach out to a contact within our firm," the CEO said. "Of course, if a client needs a specialist in, say, the IT area and would like us to talk with whoever the hiring manager is in the IT department so they can be sure to understand the intricacies of the position, we have our practice expert speak directly with their client counterpart."

Round the clock

It was that combination of robust resources and organizational agility that enabled the company to get a jump on its own IT systems in the late 1990s. As the company grew its niche markets, the traditional paper system of applications and files was becoming burdensome, Essey recalled. Looking to purchase software to bring the entire placement process online, the management team came up with a list of specifications for the ideal package. It was 20 pages long.

Nothing on the market came close, so Essey decided the company would develop its own software. With a CIO, two developers, and a task force made up of employees in each user group, the team got to work. "Literally from the ground up, we built a whole front-office system interfaced to a standard accounting package, and we've been adding to it ever since," he said.

The prototype, dubbed the decidedly nonflashy Search and Retrieval System, went live in 1998. In October, TemPositions was scheduled to launch the latest version of a Web-based application it now calls IntelliStaff.

The system has turned the staffing company into a 24-hour operation and improved service for both its clients and its employees. Web-based and interactive-voice-response technology enables clients to request temporary assistance 24/7. "Our system will take a request and go into our database to find a suitable match," Essey said. Then an automated call and an e-mail will go out to an employee with details of the assignment. The employee may accept or decline the assignment and get directions to the location.



"All of that could have happened before the office even opens in the morning," he said. Later, the client gets an e-mail to approve the employee's hours and rate the employee. Finally, the system generates a bill and sends it to the client.

The newest version of IntelliStaff brings the entire process to a Web-based application, which means clients will be able to make requests, review account information, and get reports online. Employees will be able to communicate availability, review openings, and request assignments, accept assignments, report their hours, and review their pay stubs and benefits accrual online. "It's turning us into a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week operation without having to staff up internally to make that happen," Essey said. Efficiency is not the only reason for technological improvements, however. The convenience helps TemPositions recruit and retain the best employees.

"At the end of the day, it's our pool of employees that matters most to our clients," Essey said. Clients might not care that TemPositions offers direct deposit and no-fee payroll debit cards, paid vacation and holidays, company subsidized medical insurance packages, and a 401(k) and childcare reimbursement, but they do care that the workers who arrive at their place of business are qualified, capable, and available when they need them.

"Our goal is to try to keep the best people working for us," he said. "Many work full time; they just work full time for us. That helps us attract and retain good people, and that works well for our clients." ■

Deborah Geering, dgeering@gmail.com, is a freelance writer in Atlanta.

