

# ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH BUSINESS MONDAY

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**Phil Horstmann**

**Title:** President, founder of Ascent Corp.

**Year Founded:** 1998

**Company address:**  
9666 Olive Boulevard, Suite 500, Olivette

**Sales:** \$4.6 million in 2002

**Employees:** 88, including about 60 in St. Louis

**Key customers:**  
Savvis Communications Corp., Reuters, Sara Lee Corp., Conoco-Phillips

**Previous work:**  
Paramedic, Co-owner, Horstmann Brothers of Creve Coeur



Phil Horstmann (right), president and founder of Ascent Corp., and Mark Moffett, critical systems engineer, look over the air-conditioning units for Savvis Communications Corp.'s data center in Hazelwood. The temperature in the building stays at 68 degrees to keep the computers running smoothly. Horstmann has built Ascent into a multimillion-dollar firm that specializes in advanced technology consulting.

## TIME & PLACE

*A chance encounter led Phil Horstmann to open what became a multimillion-dollar technology consulting firm.*

**BY CYNTHIA WILSON**  
*Of the Post-Dispatch*

Talk with the average entrepreneur and you might learn that part of his or her early success came from being in the right place at the right time.

Phil Horstmann, president of Ascent Corp., fits that category. Horstmann's big break came at a social gathering in 1998 when he met Robert McCormick, the founder of Bridge Information Systems Inc. McCormick mentioned that he was having prob-

lems with the back-up generators that cool the company's data center.

Horstmann was a paramedic and co-owner of a landscaping business at the time. He was looking to start another business around construction or

### Ascent milestones

**June 1998** Ascent Corp. is founded by Phil Horstmann.

**February 1999** Ascent secures its first long-term critical systems management contract from Bridge Information Systems.

**October 1999**  
Ascent breaks ground on its first supersecure data-hosting center for Savvis

Communications Corp. at 587 McDonnell Boulevard.

**February 2000**  
Ascent adds information-technology consulting, project management and network engineering to its services.

**January 2001**  
Ascent lands its first multiyear IT consulting contract with a San Diego based financial-services company.

**August 2002**  
Ascent designs and deploys St. Louis' first wireless roaming campus at CityPlace, a 43-acre mixed-use property being developed by Koman Group in Creve Coeur.

**January 2003**  
Ascent launches Streamline Intelligent Technology Outsourcing, a secure remote virtual IT infrastructure and management service for smaller companies.

equipment, but hadn't pinpointed an opportunity to pursue. He told McCormick he could fix the problem.

Horstmann had no formal technology training, but he'd learned enough about mechanics and technology by reading trade publications and maintaining equipment at the fire house to complete the job.

"You can learn a lot online and learning from other subject-matter experts," said Horstmann, who completed the two-month assignment by himself.

That job led to others and McCormick, now chairman of Savvis Communications Corp. in Town and Country, has been an Ascent customer ever since.

Ascent, meanwhile, has grown into a multimillion dollar firm that specializes in advanced technology consulting — despite getting its start on the threshold of the dot.com bust that claimed many emerging technology firms.

The Olivette-based company has done more than \$900 million in enterprise-scale information technology work and increased its staff by more than 72 percent in the last 12 months.

Ascent's rapid growth led it to relocate twice since it was founded in 1998. Its lat-

est move in June was to offices nearly three times the size of its previous home in Creve Coeur.

Horstmann believes the key to Ascent's success is the services it provides. When he started the business, Ascent helped data-center operators determine the technology needed for the facilities housing their businesses. The company also offered guidance on how to secure, maintain and manage that technology.

Basic infrastructure assessment, project management and critical systems management are still core business services for Ascent. But Horstmann knew early on that he would need to diversify the company's services and customer base to grow.

"I really enjoy assembling a good team, a good group of people that know a lot more about things than I'll never know," he said.

In 2001, Ascent developed network engineering capabilities and built its technology consulting practice. Since then, Ascent has added network design and continuous management to its services.

The changes helped Ascent's revenues increase to more than \$4.6 million last

year from less than \$2 million in 2000. Horstmann estimates that revenues could reach \$5.5 million in 2004.

He hopes a good portion of that will come from a new product for small and mid-sized firms called Streamline Intelligence Technology Outsourcing. Among other things, the fully integrated product includes e-mail, a file server, backup and recovery system, and Web hosting. The platform allows smaller firms to have the power and reliability of large information technology department as close as their desktop computers.

"It's a Fortune 100 IT department in a box," Horstmann said. "It would be my hope that it would change the way businesses approach how they deliver technology to their employees' desktop or PC."

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