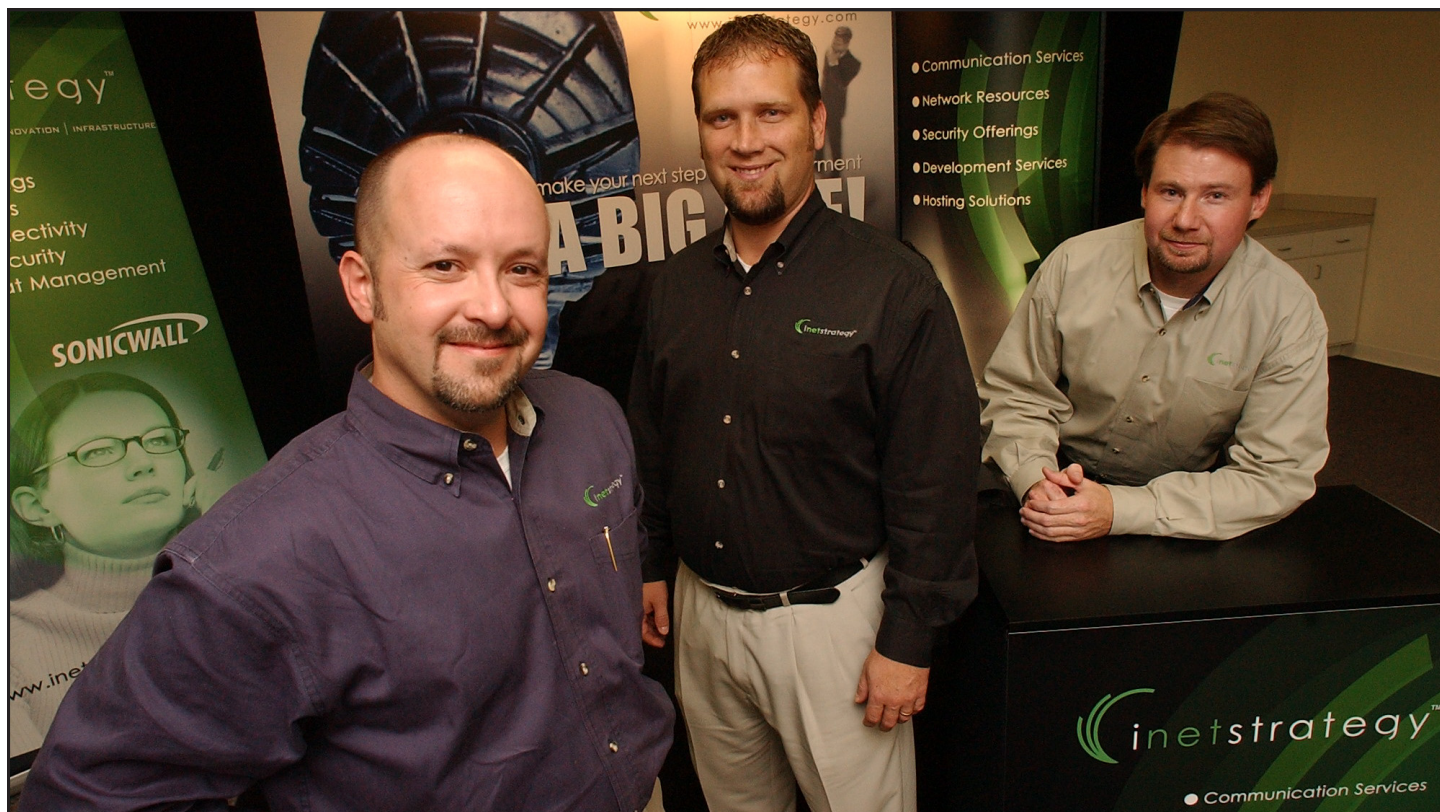


## ENTREPRENEUR



TODD STRINGER ■ NASHVILLE BUSINESS JOURNAL

iNet President and COO Robert Morris, CTO and Principal Gerald Branim and CFO Bevan Major

## Going back to the drawing board

### Applying lessons learned along the way, iNet regains its footing

BY ROY MOORE  
NASHVILLE BUSINESS JOURNAL

For the CEO, every event is an educational experience. And two years as head of iNet Strategy has given Robert Morris plenty of these lessons on running a company. Among them: Don't rely on one major client for the bulk of your sales, broaden your skill set to adapt to changing markets and only take calculated risks.

Thus are the lessons learned by a company looking to be a one-stop tech shop where changing technology and the feast-or-famine nature of business creates unstable environments.

But Morris' company, iNet Strategy, has applied these lessons to craft a 40-employee Nashville operation that expects revenue to jump this year by 50 percent. With a list of clients such as the Bone & Joint Clinic, Forensic Medical and the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders and Exhibitors Association, iNet Strategy might double into a \$15 million concern in the next three years.

Like businesses in other industries, the company deals with issues over customer retention and fuel rates. New sales require additional resources, which then require more revenue growth.

iNet Strategy traces its history back to the Meridian Group, a technology firm that sold

to NetSetGo at the early part of the decade. In a period of uncertainty, consolidation in the tech space was considered a smart play, but in the fickle industry, NetSetGo did not prove viable as a going concern and its marriage with the profitable Meridian was untenable. Eventually, Meridian's former owners bought back the company, renaming the Nashville presence iNet Strategy.

"We were going to lose it all, if we let them keep ultimate control. We had to do it because, if we didn't, we'd be pulled down with them," Morris says.

Morris, who had known the Meridian workers from his days at Community

Health Systems, joined the company and was later elevated to president and COO in the second quarter of 2003.

His honeymoon at the helm didn't last long. Shortly after taking over iNet Strategy, the company received potentially devastating news. The parent company of the Sharpie marker, iNet Strategy's largest client, decided to sever its ties with iNet Strategy and all consulting firms, in order to do the work themselves.

"Much like many companies, we had all our eggs in one basket," Morris says.

iNet Strategy went back to school. Morris wanted the company's programmer knowledgeable in all programming languages. He also wanted the company to offer a vast suite of programs, not just custom applications. In came applications for network security, spam killing and other programs that can be offered to clients.

Today, the company finds 60 percent of its business in the application development field and the rest in network infrastructure development for health

care, banking and manufacturing clients.

One client, the Tennessee Orthopaedic Alliance, has turned toward iNet Strategy as it ramps up its technology adoption. The Nashville physician group this year is implementing a paperless medical record - filmless imaging — upgrading and bringing in-house a dictation software program and speeding up intra-office communication. To integrate many of these programs, Tennessee Orthopaedic needed a technology company to assist with HL7 - the standards for electronic passing of clinical, financial and administrative data in health care.

Leveraging the common platform used by all of these programs — Steve Wade, Tennessee Orthopaedic's executive director, believes — can eliminate redundancy and cost. Instead of paying redundant annual maintenance fees for the HL7 interfaces, he and iNet Strategy developed a turnkey basis on the front end that is expected to save headaches and money in the long term.

"We're probably not atypical from a lot of health care companies our size, where we have the internal ingenuity to achieve those things. But if you're trying to achieve them in a narrow time frame, you need to bite the bullet and get some help," Wade says.

Not all the ideas have worked for iNet Strategy. Morris one day dreamed up what he thought was an exciting app - a virtual sign-in book for funeral homes, allowing those unable to actually attend the service to at least sign the book. Unfortunately, the funeral home industry is wracked with tight margins and even an inexpensive program such as this has been met with little interest. Now Morris concedes his company will likely never recoup the money it invested in the project, showing again why progress for tech companies such as iNet Strategy often is "two steps forward, one step back."

That experience has cemented the lesson of keeping your eye on the ball and avoiding unnecessary risks.

rmoore@bizjournals.com ■ 615-248-2222 ext. 117

Reprinted with permission from the *Nashville Business Journal*. ©2005, all rights reserved.

Reprinted by Scoop ReprintSource 1-800-767-3263



3343 Perimeter Hill Drive

Suite 317

Nashville, TN 37211

p: 615.835.4300

f: 615.331.2484

[www.inetstrategy.com](http://www.inetstrategy.com)