

# Mining the Net

## KC techie flips Web enterprises.

STORY BY DAYNE LOGAN

As anyone who has been involved in the dot-com industry since its boom in the mid-'90s can attest, almost nothing has changed as quickly or as dramatically as the Internet in the last 15 years. Kansas City entrepreneur Gabriel Murphy, who is now CEO of **Abacus America (aplus.net)**, has seen the evolution firsthand.

In 1997, Murphy and a partner, Bryan Heitman, founded a Web hosting company called **CommuniTech.Net**. The business plan was cutting-edge at the time: hosting Web sites for businesses. "Back then, the Internet was just being discovered as a business tool," Murphy says. "My vision was that every business would need a Web site."

Murphy was seeing 20/20. Almost immediately, CommuniTech.Net's business shot through the roof. "It was the best," Murphy says with a smile. "You didn't have to advertise; it was too easy." In fact, business was so good that in just a few years' time, CommuniTech.Net had grown from a two-man operation to a 56-person Web hosting dynamo that was rated in the top five globally.

However, by the time the new millennium rolled around, things had started to shift dramatically within Murphy's domain. "The industry was rapidly changing," he says. "It became very competitive very quickly." For that reason, Murphy decided to sell CommuniTech.Net in 2002.

Not yet 30, Murphy was not content to sit on the sidelines and started a new business, **iNET Interactive**, almost immediately after the sale. Equipped with the knowledge acquired from the running of CommuniTech.Net, Murphy saw a niche in the online advertising industry and

decided to pursue it. Much like CommuniTech.Net, iNET blossomed immediately, grew rapidly and was sold within three years.

Murphy says that despite his companies' successes, he didn't like the micromanagement it required to start a business from scratch. "I like building much more than I like running," Murphy says. That's why, in 2006, Murphy and a group of investors decided to purchase the already-established Web hosting (among other things) company aplus.net.

Since the takeover and the installation of Murphy as the company's CEO, aplus.net has increased its revenues by 23 percent. Murphy says that although his startups were tremendously successful, he feels more comfortable in his current position because it allows him to take a more hands-off approach.

Just as the Internet industry has evolved, Murphy says he too has been forced to change as a manager as he has moved from business to business. At iNET and CommuniTech.Net, Murphy was involved in almost every compo-

ment of the business, from development to implementation and marketing. In his current role, he is responsible for gathering the pieces of the puzzle, but he leaves the placement of those pieces up to his employees—something that was difficult for him to do in his initial ventures.

Murphy says it is his belief that managers can be successful in a number of ways. He has seen prosperity both as a heavily involved owner/operator and now as a behind-the-scenes CEO. While he prefers the latter ("It's just my personal style," he says), Murphy is living proof that a little flexibility in the business world can go a long way toward achieving success. **KCB**



THE MANAGEMENT STYLE OF TECH ENTREPRENEUR GABRIEL MURPHY HAS CHANGED AS HE'S MOVED FROM BUSINESS TO BUSINESS TO BUSINESS.