Ragula Bhaskar: Data mining success

Founder leads FatPipe's impressive growth

SALT LAKE CITY, Utah — What do mining engineering and wide area data networks have in common? More than you would think. "In mining engineering, the challenge is to find the most efficient methods for moving coal or metal ore from its underground source to the surface," says Ragula Bhaskar, a specialist in mining engineering and president, chief executive officer and co-founder of FatPipe Networks Inc. "With data networks, there is also a need to move material — in this case, data packets — from their original point to the end user."

Making significant moves in his own life, the 47-year-old Bhaskar has mined gold, in a sense, with his company that specializes in advanced mission critical wide area data networks. After serving on the faculty of Pennsylvania State University, where he earned his master's and doctorate degrees in mining engineering and business administration, Bhaskar accepted a teaching position at the University of Utah. Soon after moving west, however, this native of Chennai, India, became intrigued with the possibility of "having my ideas realized in a much larger sphere of influence." In 1994, Bhaskar made his move by opening the doors to FatPipe.

Under Bhaskar's leadership, FatPipe's growth rate was more than 44 percent in 2004 and 33 percent in 2005. In 2006, his firm was ranked 381 in the Deloitte Technology Fast 500 survey of the quickest growing companies in North America and 64th in Mountain West Venture Group's survey of the top-100 fastest growing Utah companies. FatPipe's growth is also reflected in its workforce, which has blossomed from 10 employees to more than 100 since its inception. In addition to its Salt Lake City headquarters, FatPipe also has offices in Phoenix and Chennai, India.

FatPipe's products have proven popular with a wide range of private and public entities and includes a customer list ranging from Jelly Belly, makers of the famous gourmet jelly bean candies, to Pier I Imports, the Marriott and Hilton hotel chains, the U.S. Supreme Court, the FBI and nonprofits such as the American Diabetes Association and Goodwill.

While his client list may be diverse, Bhaskar notes that FatPipe's customers all benefit from his company's focus on providing "reliable, redundant wide area network capabilities." As to how his product performs in the field, Bhaskar likes to use the example of client Next Generation Radiology, a provider of radiology services for many Pennsylvania and New Jersey based hospitals.

"Let's say you have a trauma patient who needs emergency services," explains Bhaskar. "As part of the patient's examination, Next Generation radiologists need information conveyed by computer data lines. If the computer data line goes down, the hospital is left to scramble for ways to reach an accurate diagnosis." By utilizing multiple lines to computer data networks, FatPipe helps to guarantee that these lines will be close to 100 percent reliable to ensure that such information can be accessed reliably, quickly and efficiently.

In an every day setting, Bhaskar cites how FatPipe, by ensuring the redundancy of multiple data connections, helps to make sure that, for example, consumers can use their VISA credit cards for purchases at Home Depot.

Whether the need is life-saving or not, however, Bhaskar indicates that FatPipe's effectiveness — and success — has been realized by "our proven ability to provide clients with access to data that also provides full transmission security and super bandwith capability."

Bhaskar has further helped to ensure both product capability and innovation by securing patents for tools, techniques and systems that are implemented on a regular basis

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throughout his company. "This helps us to capitalize on our ideas," he explains, "as well as to minimize the copying of our processes by competitors."

Much of FatPipe's success can be traced to Bhaskar's own personal and professional philosophies. For instance, he describes his leadership style as "very direct, very process driven. I strive to be clear about our processes and procedures."

"Everyone knows what to expect of me in terms of company goals and objectives," says Bhaskar. Similarly, he believes strongly in an "open door policy" where staff are free to walk into his office and speak their minds.

"His inclination toward business is highly entrepreneurial," says Alisanne Casey, FatPipe's director of communications and public relations for the past seven years. "His focus on listening to customers and finding solutions to their challenges has translated directly and effectively into company growth."

She adds: "And, with all FatPipe staff, he reinforces and encourages leadership throughout the company."

However, Bhaskar is quick to point out that such people skills have been more of a learned, rather than natural, talent.

Upon starting FatPipe, he soon came to realize that managing staff is different in academia than in private business. "I am constantly learning how to evaluate the right people for the right jobs," he says. "And once those people are in those jobs, how their skill set can be utilized so they can realize the best performance possible."

Staff retention also figures prominently in both FatPipe's and Bhaskar's success. "We are always seeking ways to keep our employees happy," he says. Team trips and competitions are regularly offered within different corporate departments. Staff are simultaneously encouraged to "be innovative, creative and share their ideas and talents," adds Bhaskar.

In addition, a great deal of effort is expended upon assimilating staff into FatPipe's corporate culture. New hires are often paired with mentors in many departments to not only ensure their understanding of the corporate mission and strategies but to also promote a sense of welcoming into the company.

In terms of his personal development, Bhaskar points to his father, who managed operations for a regional railroad in his native India as a strong role model. "He provided me with a strong work ethic," he says. "He was fair to his people

and took care of them — I learned a lot about business from observing his management style."

He also credits Raja Ramnni, who served as one of his engineering professors at Pennsylvania State University, with also having a strong impact upon him. "He taught me how to critically look at ideas and how to do better in terms of processes than what is currently being done," says Bhaskar.

Such personal and professional influences are evident in Bhaskar's future plans for FatPipe. "We are never satisfied," he says. "FatPipe's approach is to constantly innovate with new products and concepts and never to be happy with what we have. In short, our goal is to always reinforce our leadership role in this industry."