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Kansas City Business Journal - January 18, 2010  
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## KANSAS CITY BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, January 15, 2010

# Soleran lands \$1M infusion by Tradebot Ventures

Startup plans to use equity to add customers, revenue

Kansas City Business Journal - by [David Twiddy](#) Staff Writer

After a year of big gains in terms of customers and employees, **Soleran LLC** comes into 2010 with plans to ignite its brand with a big tank of fuel.

**Tradebot Ventures Inc.**, founded by serial entrepreneur Dave Cummings, last month agreed to invest \$1 million in the Overland Park-based software developer, double the \$500,000 it put into Soleran in June.

“We feel really good about the management team,” said Cummings, whose company increased its minority share. “It has met many of the goals they initially set up, and we feel there’s good growth potential going forward.”

Soleran CEO Grady Hawley declined to provide revenue but said sales and customer numbers grew about 300 percent in 2009.

With the help of Tradebot’s initial infusion, Soleran grew from three employees to about 15 and moved from incubator space at the **Enterprise Center of Johnson County** in Lenexa to Southcreek Office Park. Hawley said he expects to add 25 to 35 employees this year, which probably will mean another move.

“We’re seeing a ton of growth,” he said. “We’re trying to keep up with ourselves.”

Soleran, which was started in 2005, is trying to carve a niche in the nascent, but crowded, field of hosted customer-relationship management tools. In a market dominated by such big companies as **Salesforce.com**, Soleran is among the cheapest — \$40 a month with no annual contract — and is aimed at small and midsize companies.

Hawley and COO Greg Truitt said the multibillion-dollar CRM business will keep expanding as companies want the additional productivity of the tools without installing and maintaining programs.

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“In an industry where simplicity and savings are really driving the industry, we believe we are positioned at the head of the line,” Truitt said.

And Soleran wants more. Hawley and Truitt said they plan to use much of the new investment to expand marketing for eSalesTrack, including rebranding its Web site and pushing into blogs, Internet search engines and social networking.

“We’d rather gain customers on our reputation,” Truitt said. “We think it’s a lot more effective when you hear about someone by word of mouth. It used to be to get word of mouth it had to be local, but now it’s completely opposite. Customers in Los Angeles talk about us on a podcast or IT blog.”

Although the company can claim customers as far away as Ireland, Truitt said getting attention from Kansas City businesses sometimes has been difficult.

“We may be better known in L.A. than in Kansas City,” he said.

Besides being local guys and wanting a local presence, Hawley and Truitt said they want to shine a spotlight on the local tech community in hopes of attracting more high-tech developers to join the engineering talent already here because of the area’s universities and big tech employers such as Sprint Nextel Corp., Garmin International Inc. and Cerner Corp.

“We’re a Silicon Valley-type company here in Kansas City,” Hawley said. “If we can have a company grow and be successful, a nationally recognized tech company on the broad business scale, that should attract other light technical companies and developers.”

Cummings, who founded **Tradebot Systems Inc.** and **BATS Global Markets**, a national stock exchange, said that the area provides a good foundation for tech entrepreneurs but that its lower cost of living and technical education programs should create more.

“The Internet has kind of leveled the playing field, and it doesn’t really matter where you are,” he said. “If the product is good and the management is good, they’ll do fine. Winners are going to be winners.”

Joel Wiggins, CEO of the Enterprise Center of Johnson County, said information technology companies continue to attract the bulk of new investment and make up the majority of local startups. Many of those companies end up going head to head with businesses outside the region. So it’s difficult to know how competitive the area is for technology, he said, but there have been enough successes — like Soleran — to say the area is doing something right.

“There’s a lot of price compression and competition, but I think there’s a lot of innovation possible as well,” he said.

*davidtwiddy@bizjournals.com | 816-777-2204*

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