

Len Farias and Johnny Allen bring Austin, Texas-based CM IT Solutions franchise to Brevard — serves as information-technology arm for a growing number of small to mid-sized businesses

By Ken Datzman

ROCKLEDGE — The outsourcing of information-technology services by small and mid-sized businesses has driven the powerful growth of companies such as CM IT Solutions Inc. of Austin, Texas. The company has built a network of 100 franchise locations in more than 30 states over the past decade.

Rising salaries in the tech field, unpredictable IT budgets, and the loss of productivity when systems break down, have sent more businesses scurrying to outsource their computer operations. They are handing over control to experts that offer flat-rate professional-service plans to businesses. CM IT Solutions finds itself positioned to gain from this trend.

"Typically, it would cost a small- to medium-sized business from \$50,000 to \$80,000 a year to have an internal IT person on staff," said Len Farias, president of computer-support firm CM IT Solutions Inc. of South Brevard (sobrevard.cmitsolutions.com). "Our company can provide these services on an outsource basis at a fraction of the cost. We operate as their full-time IT department and have the clout of a national franchise behind us."

Adds Johnny Allen, manager of technical services for CM IT Solutions of South Brevard: "CM IT's business model is based on pro-active IT outsourcing, as opposed to waiting for the phone to ring from a business and then responding. At that point, they are sort of in a desperation mode because their machine is down and they're concerned about the company's data."

Business partners Farias and Allen are looking to capitalize on the growth of IT outsourcing with their new franchise. CM IT Solutions of South Brevard opened in March in Rockledge and services small- to mid-sized businesses throughout the county, generally companies with five to 100 employees, said Farias, who has more than 20 years experience in technology sales and marketing.

"CM IT Solutions is being well received in the market. Our sales have increased every month. Our profits are ahead of projections and our expenses are below projections. We believe CM IT brings a lot of value to a business. Over the past 20 years, EDS, IBM, Lucent and other industry giants have provided outsourced IT solutions for Fortune 500 companies. Now we are able to do this on a smaller scale because many of these services have become affordable."

Farias says there are roughly 24,000 businesses in Brevard that have from one to 100 employees, based on research from InfoUSA, a national database marketing company, and from the Economic Development Commission of Florida's Space Coast. "That presents a lot of opportunity for CM IT Solutions. We operate in a service-driven industry, and we plan to grow by offering top-notch customer service to businesses in Brevard."

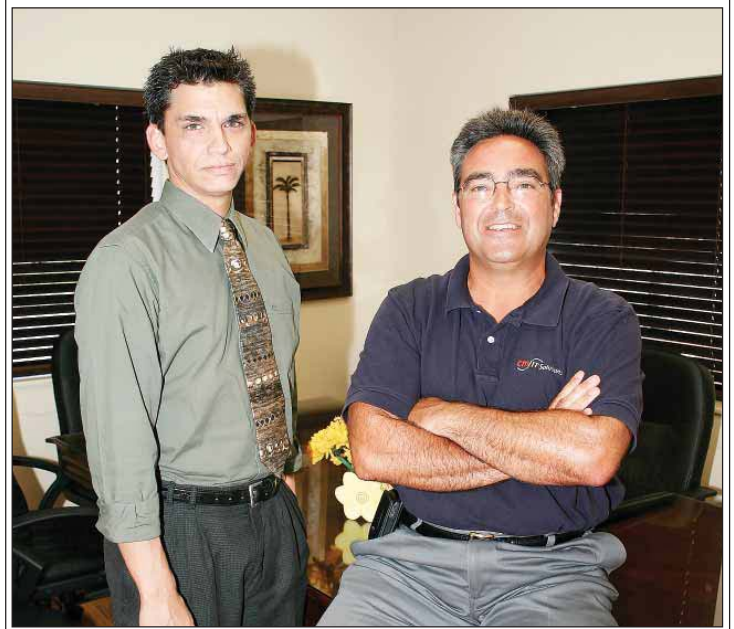
Their company already serves three-dozen clients, from Titusville to Palm Bay.

CM IT's roots go back to the mid-1990s, when Georgia Jones started the company in Austin. It was then known as Computer Moms. "She targeted stay-at-home moms. The company became so successful it evolved to become a nationwide franchise network," Farias said. CM now stands for Computer Management.

"I was attracted to the franchise for a number of reasons," Farias said. "For one, CM IT Solutions has built a back-office infrastructure second to none. It has a network-operations center in Fremont, Calif., and two secure data centers — one in Lexington, Mass., and the other in Austin. Our clients in Brevard really have an army of technical experts that support their computers and servers 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They have a U.S.-based help desk ready to assist them at any time."

Farias purchased the CM IT Solutions franchise in January and later partnered with Allen, who was an independent IT consultant in Brevard. He ran his own computer-networking company, ROTU Enterprises Inc. Allen, a network engineer, merged his business, which also did video work, into CM IT Solutions.

"Johnny brings the technical expertise to the table and I bring the sales and marketing piece," said Farias. "Throughout my career in the telecommunications industry, I'd always worked alongside a technologist. I did the marketing and sales, but a technical professional was right there. I knew to make this venture successful I



BBN photo — Adrienne B. Roth

Len Farias, right, and Johnny Allen, business partners, opened CM IT Solutions of South Brevard in March. Headquartered in Rockledge, they have franchise rights for Brevard. CM IT Solutions of Texas is a leading provider of IT professional services and products to small and mid-sized businesses in more than 30 states. Since opening, their business has experienced strong growth, building a base of more than 30 clients. Farias is company president while Allen is manager of technical services.

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Farias worked for several large manufacturers of telecommunications equipment that sold primarily to the service-provider sector. He called on service providers along the East Coast that were building sizable infrastructure networks.

Allen has a broad technology background. His resume includes having worked for Computer Sciences Raytheon at the 45th Space Wing at Patrick Air Force Base and for Mercedes Homes' corporate office in Melbourne. "Those were very good experiences. I earned a number of certifications while working at CSR. At Mercedes Homes, I really got into the meat and potatoes of the technology world and gained some management experience along the way. Then I decided to launch my own company, and it proved to be successful," said Allen.

Allen is a Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer and a Cisco Systems Certified Network Associate. Said Farias: "We have all the major certifications that we need to work on computer networks in the county, actually for any size business. However, we concentrate on the small and medium-size business client."

CM IT Solutions Inc. recently announced an ambitious expansion that will take place over the next four years. It plans to add 400 franchisees by 2011.

Companies across the nation continue to spend on IT services. Core outsourcing (IT management and process management) remains the highest growth area in the market, according to a September report by Gartner Inc., a worldwide research firm. In 2007, core outsourcing services are on track to represent 41 percent of total worldwide end-user spending on IT services, Gartner says.

"We're really upbeat on our long-term growth potential in Brevard County," Farias said. "Our client list is growing. We have a diversified group of businesses and that is encouraging."