

SETTING STRATEGY | Collaboration opens new possibilities

PARTNERS SPEED UP GROWTH

When your strengths are complementary, partnerships can “cover more ground.”

By HUMA KHAN
The Kansas City Star

Nearly 12 years after collaborating on their first project in high school, Ryan Hembree and Joshua Christie are back in business together.

The two fulfilled their promise of resuming their partnership in January, when Christie became a partner in Indicia Design, a Kansas-City based graphic design firm.

“My passion had always been running my own business and getting back together with Ryan,” Christie said. “We worked very well together.”

Partnerships can help a business grow faster than a sole venture, especially if each partner recognizes their strengths and weaknesses.

“You can get more done and can cover more ground in a partnership than in a sole proprietorship because you get so involved in the day-to-day work that you don’t look beyond that,” said Mike Haughton, co-chapter chairman and assistant district director of Service Corps of Retired Executives. “Bringing someone else in gives you more time to look beyond tomorrow’s business.”

Expanding the firm was the reason Hembree, who formed Indicia in 2001, brought Christie in as a partner.

They expect revenues for the five-employee firm to grow between 25 percent and 40 percent from \$400,000 last year.

“Having a partner allows me to step back and think more strategically about the business,” Hembree said. “Instead of being in a firefighter mode where you are putting out fires every day, I can look at



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Ryan Hembree (right) founded Indicia Design, 1510 Prospect Ave., in 2001, but longtime friend Joshua Christie didn’t become a partner until this year.

the big picture instead.”

Hembree manages the creative design aspect of the firm while Christie focuses on marketing and business development.

When they worked on their first T-shirt design project in high school, Hembree and Christie knew their skills complemented each other’s. And as students at the University of Kansas, they started an apparel design company, JC Productions.

“It comes down to the trust factor, because it’s kind of like a marriage,” Hembree said. “You’ve got to make sure it works because we are going to be together for a really long time.”

Hembree acknowledged that after handling day-to-day operations on his own for almost seven years, he had lost some of his excitement about the business.

“When I was able to share some of that burden with Josh and see his passion and excitement, it made me excited about the business again,” Hembree said. “Now I have a partner who can really relate to what’s going on and we can feed off of one another’s energy.”

Shared energy and a sense of humor has kept the partnership of Katey Tryon and Mary Heideman burgeoning over the last 10 years.

The owners of Tryon and Heideman, a Kansas City-based executive search firm, met 30 years ago. When they entered the corporate world, they knew they wanted to start their own firm one day.

Tryon attributes their company’s success to their mutual passion for and understanding of the business, and an ability to complement each other’s strengths and weaknesses.

One of the challenges of being in a partnership with someone you have known a long time, according to Tryon, is that sometimes a partner may have a tendency not to explore some ideas because they know what the other person is going to think.

Still, Tryon said she could never imagine being in a business by herself.

“I know myself well enough to know that I would be bored and I would miss the interaction,” she said.