

Pete Ashdown  
XMission  
By Jeannine Lewis

On Tuesday, September 21<sup>st</sup>, Pete Ashdown, founder of XMission, was in the classroom to share his experiences with us. Mr. Ashdown started Xmission, one of the first local internet service providers, in 1993. Originally his intent was to make the internet available to programmers and other techies similar to him who would want to have access remotely for email, usenet, file transfers, etc. He didn't imagine that it would grow like it did, and that his product would be used by average, non-technical types.

Originally, financing for Xmission was provided by his father, \$27,000 to buy some servers and modems. He worked the business 16 hours a day, mostly out of his apartment, with his servers sitting in a closet on 7<sup>th</sup> east. Now the company boasts 50 employees and 20,000 subscribers. They just recently renovated a space, spending \$1,000,000 for a state-of-the-art computer room.

Mr. Ashdown made some great moves, and some mistakes, along the way and shared some of these with us.

Keep Out One of his major points was to keep strangers out of your business. He started with money from his father, had a sister and a brother who invested as well as worked with the company, and never took money from outside investors. Along the way he had some offers, investors interested in taking the company public, but he never felt like that was the direction he wanted to take the company.

Culture is key Xmission has an environment that is unique, fun, and casual. Pete wanted an atmosphere where people wanted to be, he didn't believe in requiring people to "stay busy" when there were down times. They have TIVO, XBOX, Arcade Games, and fresh mountain dew

delivered daily. They have a great Christmas party and an inclusive (except for the accounting department) environment. Pete really feels this has been one of the keys to the success of Xmission.

Pay your people well When the offers to go public came rolling in, Pete recognized he could really make a lot of money by going along, but didn't want to do that to his people. He didn't want to make six or seven figures while his people were paid minimum wage. He takes care of his employees, pays them well, and reaps the rewards through their customer service to the end-user.

Full disclosure Pete has always tried to be honest and open with his customers. If he has a system problem he doesn't try to cover it up with technical explanations or denial, he tells them about the issues and the resolutions. Most of the time he finds the customers appreciate this candor and stay with him; he admits the occasional bad apple but overall feels this philosophy is best.

Support the community Xmission supports local radio, politics, and businesses; giving back to the community.

In contrast to Brian Boam and Mike Drury, Pete Ashdown seemed to be much less aggressive when it comes to the direction of his company. I got the impression that he had a mixture of a really good idea and vision, and a fair amount of opportunity and luck. As questions were posed to him about the future of Xmission, he didn't seem to me to be interested in growing the company or creating new and innovative things but is happy with the status quo. He also isn't looking for an opportunity to step out of the company and start a new one. He has created a world where he enjoys spending time and doesn't seem to need to change anything about it.