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Strategies

Bank security specialist, buoyed by post-crash innovation, readies new Portland HQ

Cook Security's rapid expansion prompts move to new Portland HQ

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Sometimes it takes a big crash in the economy to set a company on a new course.

At least that's what happened a decade ago for Milwaukie-based [Cook Security Group](#) when the 2007 meltdown of financial markets disrupted the way banks do business.

"We were installing cameras and other security components at the rate of three to five new bank branches per month," said Brian Cook, CEO of Cook Security. "It freaked us out because at the time, we were a physical security company. And banks started shrinking their branches and using more technology instead."

In 2007, Cook Security had 40 employees and revenue of \$7 million.

Today, the company has more than 250 employees, is on track to exceed \$50 million in revenue this year and has seven offices.

Well before the recession, however, Cook had the kind of mindset to succeed. In 2002, Cook had a job at a security company that went bankrupt. When that happened, "customers begged Brian to continue their services," said Randy Neu, the company's chief marketing officer. "They didn't want to say goodbye to his 'make it happen' style."

So Cook, along with Molly Angelo, who now is COO, started Cook Security to continue serving those customers. The business soon grew with new clients.

By the end of 2007, when the economy crashed, what had enabled them to create a loyal following in the first place — the practice of being good listeners and the "make it happen" style — would propel them through the economic storm.

"We just put ourselves in the shoes of our companies — we looked to help them save money and become more efficient," Cook said.



CATHY CHENEY

Cook Security CEO Brian Cook said the company — which employs 250 — has 20 open positions and anticipates hiring more once it moves into its new Portland headquarters.

Embracing software

That meant providing services their customers needed — regardless of whether those needs were in the realm of traditional physical security or in cyberspace.

“We started hiring software developers,” Cook said. Banks and credit unions needed help creating automated kiosks instead of branches, they needed support to avoid skimming ploys and partners for video conference platforms.

Running with that mentality meant developing their own software products to serve the market, a level of responsiveness that eluded behemoth competitors.

“During the worst of the financial crisis, we evolved and kept growing,” said Cook.

As a result, the company has outgrown its Milwaukie headquarters, which it built and moved into in 2007. Last month, construction began on a larger facility located on Portland’s Airport Way. Move-in is slated for next August.

The new location, in the same neighborhood as Portland International Airport and a short jaunt from light rail and hotels, is ideal for the company. Staff based at Cook’s offices in other cities regularly come to the headquarters for training, Cook said. Branch offices are in Medford; Kent, Wash.; Boise, Idaho; and Benicia and Corona, Calif.

Quick-service specialists

Cook’s list of clients reads like a who’s-who in banking in the western U.S.: Pacific Continental Bank, West Coast Bank, [Columbia Bank](#), [Umpqua Bank](#), [Unitus Credit Union](#), [Advantis Credit Union](#) and others. It also includes giants such as [Bank of America](#), [U.S. Bank](#), [Wells Fargo](#) and [Chase Bank](#).

Today Cook Security offers an array of services that includes alarm and access control, ATMs, ITMs, video and CCTV, drive-ups and night drops, lock work, safes and vaults, as well as cyber security. The company also provides consulting for security services, as well as for investigations, executive protection, security training and development of workplace violence programs. In addition, the new headquarters will have a Security Operations Center and a Network Operations Center.

Cook Security’s remote capabilities for trouble-shooting and maintenance to support ATMs and other automated banking activities makes it an outlier among competitors, according to Brian Alfano, vice president and chief retail officer for Portland-based [Unitus Community Credit Union](#).

When one of Unitus’ ATMs that wasn’t supported by Cook went down, Alfano said Unitus waited two weeks for a technician to arrive. Now Cook supports all of Unitus’s ATMs and when there is a problem, it’s almost always taken care of remotely and usually within minutes.

“A remote system like that is fairly unique,” Alfano said.

A challenge of rapid growth is ensuring customers don’t feel the turbulence.

“They’ve grown in a very smart way where they did not lose that culture. In fact, if I deliver a new policy, they’re implementing it within minutes,” said Steve Ryker, a director of security for [Wells Fargo](#). Cook Security provides a portion of security for Wells Fargo in the western United States. “Their dedication to quality is unmatched in the field.”

To provide that high level of service, Cook Security follows hiring advice from Warren Buffet: "We're always looking for intelligent, high-energy and high-integrity people," Cook said.

With the ever-growing need for cybersecurity, the company has 20 open positions, anticipates hiring with the opening of its new building and foresees steady job creation beyond that.

"To have a job creator that's growing, build a new headquarters here, and know that they'll keep growing here, is exciting," said Alfano.

CLOSER LOOK

The company: Cook Security Group

Headquarters: Milwaukie, but relocating to new facility near Portland International Airport

Top executive: CEO Brian Cook

Revenue: Projected to reach \$50 million-plus this year

Employees: 250

On the web: Cooksecuritygroup.com