



M I S S O U R I
Real People. Real Opportunity.

David Steward
Chairman of the Board
World Wide Technology

St. Louis
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Missouri is become home to more and more IT companies looking to relocate or expand, largely because of its low business costs, including the cost of labor. But it's actually the abundance and degree of talent within the labor pool that has ultimately convinced many of these companies to locate or expand here. David Steward of World Wide Technology is enthusiastic about St. Louis' increasing role in the IT market.

"We have some untapped, unrealized potential here. If there's anyplace that's going to take the lead in the global marketplace, it's going to be St. Louis. St. Louis is visionary, open-minded.

"At World Wide, we're trying to put a definition on technology...and helping shape what the next generation looks like. From Silicon Valley to the (North Carolina) triangle to Austin and around the globe, we're changing the landscape of how technology is deployed. We're managing IT in the business sectors where it's vitally needed and undergirding it to protect systems in a unique way."

The change that's inherent to IT work in general is key to growing World Wide as a business.

"This country was built on entrepreneurship. We innovate here. And, because we have the freedom, and it's accepted in our culture – we take some risk. And there's reward for that risk.

"World Wide has shown that diversity can work in the Midwest. There's a bunch of people from cultural groups and religions here. But we all have a common vision, and we believe in this dream. We know our competitive edge is our ability to come together to make this thing happen.

"We've got 1,650 people working for us now. And there's nothing I won't do for our people. And there's nothing our people won't do for our partnerships and relationships. Our customers' sales forces see that and they talk about World Wide to their customers.

"We can put a multiplier on that. We can see that, instead of chasing money, money's chasing us. But it's not about quarterly earnings, it's about bringing more value to what we do."

World Wide viewed the recession through that same lens. And the company grew.

"Nobody got laid off. We'd made a commitment to our people: 'No matter how bad it is, nobody's going to get laid off. You do your job? We'll make it through.'

"We continued to invest and improve our business proposition so we'd be uniquely positioned for the next generation – and scalable for global demand. In 2007, we upgraded our ERP. We reengineered our entire business. 200 people outside and inside working on every component to put this new system in place. It was like flying a plane and changing the engines at the same time.

"At that time, we had almost a \$2 billion business. But we were doing this for the \$20 billion business we were going to be.

"18 months later, we made the switch. And boom! It worked perfectly. It's evolving now, and our customers are really benefitting from it. This year we'll do well in excess of 4 billion dollars in business because of those systems.

"When we started this company and called it World Wide, people were laughing. We had 4000 square feet! Now we've got well in excess of 2 million square feet across the country and around the globe. We're in Shanghai, Singapore, Mexico, Brazil, Germany, Korea. And it's all because we looked beyond our circumstances. People aren't laughing so much anymore."

Steward has a history of building not only companies, but whole industries, from the ground up. World Wide is a big part of that story.

"I graduated from UCM (University of Central Missouri). This guy in town liked me because I was a basketball player, and he let me borrow \$300 from his bank. I took an army duffle bag with everything I owned and hitchhiked to St. Louis where I got my first job with the Boy Scouts. Then I worked for the old Missouri Pacific Railroad, and then I worked for Federal Express in sales.

"I wound up at a Federal Express national sales meeting where I was honored as salesman of the year. I went up on stage to be recognized, and I had an epiphany. I said, 'Is this the end? Is this going to be the highlight of my career?'"

It was actually the beginning.

"In 1983, I decided I'm going to buy a business. I had 2 children, a mortgage, 2 cars, and people looked at me and said, 'you're nuts.' It was a tough time.

"But, if you're good at building relationships, if you stand on principle and are a trustworthy person and have integrity and a good work ethic, you can make it. You just do what you do best. I convinced a guy in Kansas City to sell me his business for nothing down. This was a company that audited and analyzed freight bills for overcharges. I expanded it into a brokerage operation, because I saw all the tentacles of how that freight was being moved.

"We took private and commercial fleets. We specialized in liquid bulk products like linseed oil, cottonseed oil, orange juice. It was great, it was fun. But I had an idea in the back of my mind. So I went to my customers and said, 'There's this concept I've got. I'm finding just as many problems with you undercharging as overcharging. I want to set up a separate operation and do an undercharge audit for you.' I convinced them.

"Now I had one of the largest Class I railroads in the country allowing me to do an undercharge audit! In the 150-year history of the railroad, that had never happened before. Never.

"And so, as a result of that, I had to figure out how I was going to manage this information. I put together a trained audit staff and, in 1987, we built one of the first networks right here in St. Louis. We hung 8088 machines on it, we had a file server that was 660 megabytes, we had a gateway tied to the railroads themselves. We used C++ to develop a software application that allowed us to do the audit 40 times faster than the railroads could do it themselves. We were using internet and extranet and intranet applications before anyone knew what they were.

"So I was like, 'Hmmm... Am I in the business of doing audits? Or am I in the business of using technology in an innovative way? And, do I want to be a part of the revolution?'"

"We still do a lot with logistics today. We manage the supply chain for Dell Computer and AT&T networks. We're into electronic procurement logistics. And we have a demo lab that's one of a kind in the world, so the customer can go in virtually and test their applications to see how they'll work in a real environment. Tremendous value to them! Tremendous value! The customers are going crazy.

"This past fiscal year we bought over \$2 billion worth of networking equipment. We're the largest systems integrator for Cisco. And one of the largest in the world. We have the biggest IT players in the world as customers. These companies are 10 times bigger than we are, but they want to do business with us."