

*Area businesses make a list of Florida's 100 fastest growing companies*

## **COMPANIES ON RISE**

### **Digi-Net, Adbiz stake out claims on top 20**

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**Doris Chandler**

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Seven Gainesville area businesses have earned a spot on the 2001 Florida 100 list, which ranks the fastest growing private companies in the state.

The Florida 100 list is a program of the University of Florida's Warrington College of Business Administration, the Fisher School of Accounting and the Center for Entrepreneurship. Companies on the list learned of their ranking in February at the annual awards banquet held in Orlando.

Debuting on the 2001 list at No. 8 was Digi-Net Technologies, Inc. in Gainesville, with a revenue growth of 666.56 percent.

The company was founded by Robert T. Parker, president, in 1996, and for the first several years provided Internet consulting for businesses. In 1999, the company began developing Internet-related software for businesses.

"What we are most proud of is that we are the No. 1 fastest growing technology company in Florida," Parker said. "That's what we're a little surprised at, and we didn't have to take any outside venture capital to do it."

The company has 31 employees, all of whom have links to UF, he said. Parker added that he left UF in his junior year to start Digi-Net.

Most of the company's business is national and international.

"About 99.9 percent of our business is outside North Central Florida," he said. "We are much more well-known in the Silicon Valley, Boston or New York, and we're in pretty much every continent except for Antarctica. More than 10,000 licenses have been sold for companies using our technology."

Adbiz, a Gainesville marketing and public relations firm, is another first timer on the list, ranked 14<sup>th</sup>. But the business also garnered a second honor – being named the state's No. 1 fastest growing company headed by a female. "I was incredibly surprised; I was blown away," said Adbiz President Nita Chester, who was awarded a plaque at the ceremony. "I'm just really very honored."

Chester and her husband, Terry, the vice president and general manager of Adbiz, have run the business together since it began, and they are in their fifth year of operation.

Their business saw a sales increase of 297 percent in 2001, earning it the 14<sup>th</sup> slot on the list.

“I was quite surprised when I went to the awards banquet and they told use that we were No. 14,” Chester said.

The Chesters attribute their steady growth to keeping the focus on their customers.

“It comes down to three different reasons,” she said. “The first reason is because at Adbiz, our goal is to focus on the success of the client, and basically this award reflects our clients’ success.” Secondly, Adbiz has assembled “an incredibly talented team,” she said of the 12 staff members.

“The third reason is that we have a great environment here. Gainesville is a great city to live in, and a lot of people have relocated here, so we’ve been able to hire top quality people,” Nita Chester said.

Terry Chester added that the company also has grown because it incorporates four elements in its operation.

“Advertising is one end of the spectrum – one sphere, and the second sphere is design which feeds the advertising,” he said. “The third sphere is marketing and public relations, which we feel are an essential part to how to do design, and the fourth sphere is training and education.”

The No. 20 slot on the list was filled by Ellis Environmental Group, LLC, o f Newberry, with a sales increase of 239.43 percent.

Area companies making return appearances on the list were: Atlantic.Net ranked 22 with an increase of 222.11 percent; Allchem Industries ranked 43<sup>rd</sup> with an increase of 114.79 percent; Environmental Consulting and Technology Inc. ranked 83<sup>rd</sup> with an increase of 45 percent; and The Paradigm Group rounded out the Gainesville contingent at No. 88 with an increase of 43.29 percent.

The Florida 100 program is in its sixth year, and its purpose is two-fold.

“It’s to honor entrepreneur companies, and the reason we’re doing that is because we want students to have something to look at saying they can do it,” said Arnold Heggstad, director of the Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation. The second goal is to develop a relationship with those companies that is a benefit to the students, to researchers and hopefully to the companies.”

Businesses on the list are chosen from among those nominated. The list of nominating qualifications include requirements that the companies be independently, privately held corporations or proprietorships – not a subsidiary or division – and be headquartered in Florida.

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