

## ACT Computers wins with slow, steady growth, customer care

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What Klaus Schwanitz enjoys most about his job is that he fixes problems for people.

Schwanitz, who, along with his son Jurgen, owns ACT Computers on U.S. 1, understands that people are tied to their computers in ways that even they don't understand and when something goes awry his company must restore order as quickly as possible.

"We take a really personal approach with our customers," Schwanitz said. "We don't sell what is on the shelf and will bring us the most profit. We want to be proud of what we do so we take time to find out what are the needs of our customers. Our company is about solving problems, not very often do people come into the store and say everything is fine."

The 60-year-old Schwanitz has cultivated a careful path to success, starting out in 1995 with a 500-square-foot shop and as his customer base and needs grew, expanded over time to his current 3,500-square-foot shop that serves about 1,000 customers a month. What may be most unique about ACT Computers is that even in the heady dot-com days when all things computer related were considered pure gold, he lived within his means and expanded as he had the cash on hand to pay his bills.

"We want to always be there for our customers," he said. "Some of our competitors have grown too big to do that."

Schwanitz came to the U.S. from Cologne, Germany, where he built data processing centers throughout Europe. His work eventually took him to the United States and after getting out of the business he settled with his family in Vero Beach.

Schwanitz started the company to help build a nest egg for son Jurgen, then a teenager working for another computer store and unhappy with the way that business was operating. The elder Schwanitz suggested to his son there was a better way to treat customers and ACT Computers was born.

The father-son team has now expanded to eight full-time employees and has been making customers happy ever since. It is that combination of careful, considered growth joined with great customer care that has made ACT Computers such a success.

He has had chances to expand and even franchise the business, but that is not Schwanitz's style, he is that rare commodity in the geeky world of computers, a people person.

"We had people who wanted to invest in us and maybe do franchises and we have looked at other locations," he said. "But at the end of the day I want to know we can



STAFF PHOTO

Klaus Schwanitz, left, and his son, Jurgen, have been in business with ACT Computers at the same location since 1995.

do everything we promise and when you get too big you can't always do that."

He takes great pride in listening to what his customers want and then building in-house (except for notebook computers) just what they need. While ACT Computers offers an insurance plan, he actually discourages customers from buying it.

"We tell the customer, your hard drive is guaranteed for three years, your motherboard has a three-year warranty, your Intel processor has a three-year warranty, your memory has a lifetime warranty," he said. "At the end of the day what are you covering? A case and a power supply fan at \$150 a year? You are buying something you already have. You are better off calling us if you have a problem and saving that money."

All the expansions at ACT Computers have been based on the company bank account. Schwanitz shuns taking on debt as much as possible. Whether it is expanding his shop or buying a van for on-site servicing, Schwanitz prefers to make those moves with cash on hand.

"We don't borrow money," he said. "We don't finance anything. If we can't afford to buy our service trucks then we shouldn't have them."

Schwanitz has hundreds of local businesses that he serves and his expectation is that he can get most customers back online quickly.

"I would say 95 percent of the computers or systems we look at are back up and running within 24 hours," he said. "We know that is very important to our customers."

It is the understanding that time is money which has Jim Wilson, the parts manager at Don's Imports on 43rd Avenue, a returning ACT customer.

"I am the in-house IT (information technology) guy and as our business has grown and the complexity of what we need to conduct business has grown, our IT needs have gone beyond my capability," he said. "Now we have a much more involved network that is integrated with our departments and ACT has been instrumental in helping set us up with that."

"They are so reliable, I call them my easy button."