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Cyzap's growth stems from Web products with emphasis on security

by Ken Wall

Beginning with its founding as a network consulting and custom programming company, Omaha-based Cyzap used the experience it gained in the technology services sector to build a line of Web-based products.

Owned by brothers Gunnit, Raman and Ashu Khurana, Cyzap now offers a complement of technology services and products to clients in the education, government and corporate realms.

The firm has performed network security projects for Nexterna and Sarpy County, designed Web material for Brownie Manufacturing and installed copies of its Web content management system at the Omaha Police Department and Creighton University.

It used to be that services such as custom programming, Web site design and hosting were the bulk of the business, and the products Cyzap developed were proprietary designs meant for a specific customer. But as the Khuranas realized their company was developing a bank of marketable Web-based products, they began to reverse the process.

Cyzap continues to offer services — security analysis, for example, remains a significant growth market. The difference is that instead of Web site design and hosting leading to the design of customer-specific products, now the deployment of customizable turn-key Web-based products that can be used in a number of operating environments brings complex design and hosting projects to Cyzap.

One of Cyzap's breakthrough products is its Web site content management application. The product makes it possible for anyone who is comfortable working in Microsoft Word to change, eliminate or add content as they wish.

While some products are targeted at specific markets such as customer relationship management, workflow management and event registration, Web site content management can be used by virtually any customer who wants to assume the responsibility of managing the information displayed on its Web site.

Gunnit Khurana, president of Cyzap, said the product's versatility can be seen in the range of customers who use it today.

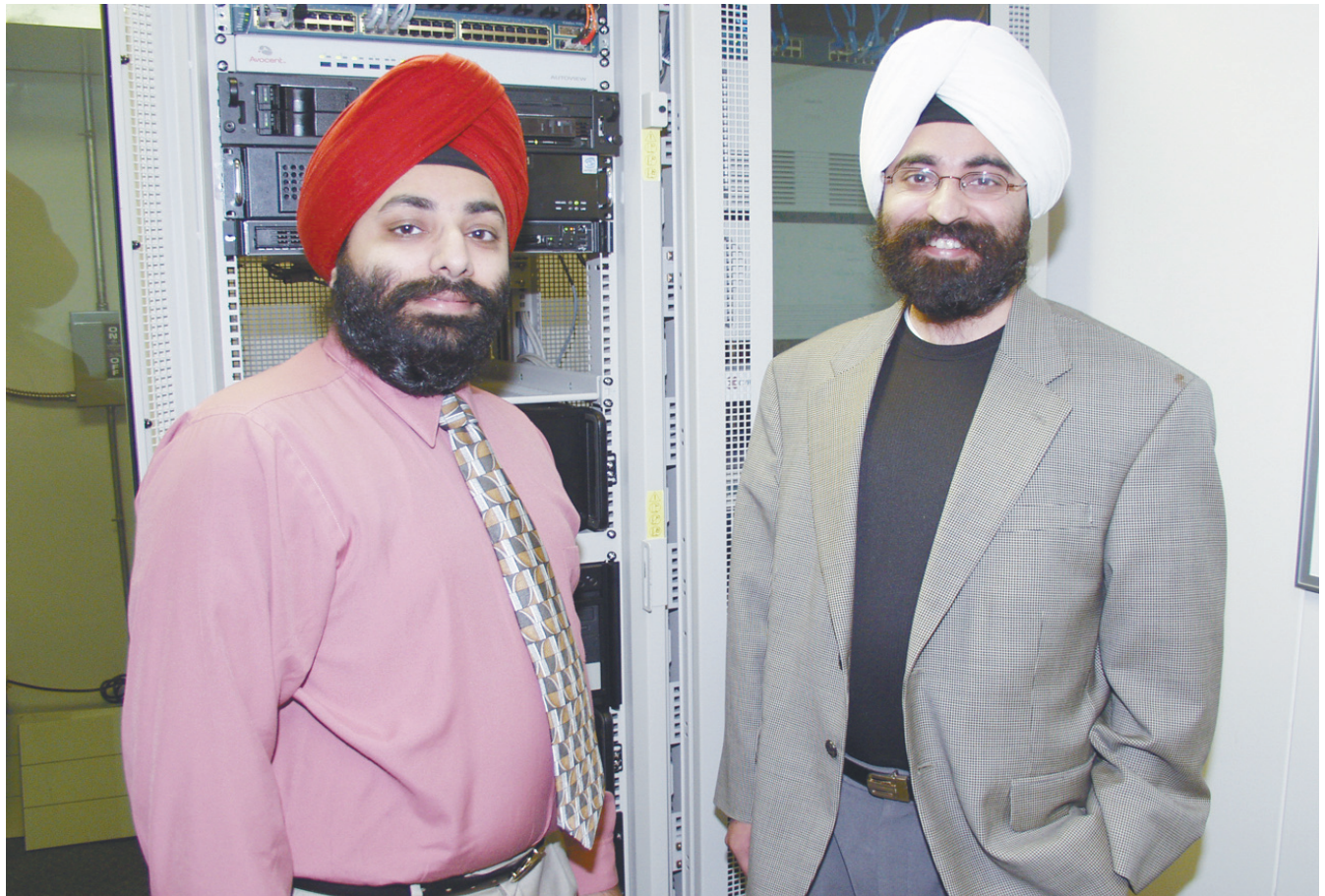
"We launched the product when we redesigned the Web site for Creighton Federal Credit Union," he said. "The result was that it took less time and cost less money to do their own updates.

"The Omaha Police Department had a site that was difficult to keep up to date in terms of posting news releases because it took 30 minutes for each news release, and nobody had the time to do it. With our product, it now takes only five minutes."

Raman Khurana, vice president of Cyzap, said beyond the immediate economic reward of having another revenue stream, moving into the Web product business allows Cyzap to capture more complex design projects without having to compete solely on the basis of price.

"Our vision is to focus on providing products that lead to services," he said. "It's a more complete package. We design the site, create the tools to make it work the way you want it to, and deliver it in a hosted environment. At the same time we are making sure our customers' networks remains secure and giving them control of their own content."

As Web technology and the ways companies use it continue to evolve, Cyzap believes the next phase is to better understand how to integrate that technology into its customers' marketing strategies.



Gunnit Khurana, at right, with Raman Khurana in the server room ... the brothers now offer a complement of technology services and products to clients in the education, government and corporate realms.

Cyzap worked with Bangkok Cafe in La Vista to develop an e-mail program that sends coupons to its customers on dates special to them. Each customer is given the option of filling out a card with birth date, wedding anniversary and other special dates as well as name and e-mail address. It takes Bangkok Cafe about a minute to enter the information into a database, and Cyzap's program does the rest.

Coupons are e-mailed a few days before each special date, and with each message the customer has the opportunity to opt out of receiving future e-mails.

A similar system developed for Kohll's Pharmacy delivers an e-mail reminder one week before a prescription is due to be refilled.

"The beauty of the Internet is how it facilitates match-making and interaction," Gunnit Khurana said. "Using the Internet, consumers can find producers with the same zeal that producers want to find consumers.

"The key to this lies in replacing unsolicited communications with targeted, requested and timely interaction. If producers are over-zealous in Internet marketing, that could hinder their goals."

Since Cyzap took on its more all-inclusive approach to Web development and services, the company has grown from Gunnit and Raman Khurana working out of a home office to 12 employees at its corporate office in Omaha and another five at a branch office that opened last year in Phoenix.

The second location is being cultivated both to capture new business and to provide redundancy to the servers in the firm's main data center here.

Raman Khurana said a challenge is helping customers make the transition from using the Internet as a means of broadcasting general information on a broad scale to leading pinpointed marketing campaigns.

"Our challenge is convincing the customer, 'If you build it, they will come — and if you build it right, they will come again,'" he said. "The only

caveat is that the Internet integration phase requires patience and persistence. It's not something that will grow your business overnight.

"For example, it took us two months to set up a subscription-based e-marketing system for one customer, and then it took the customer four months to populate its subscription database to the point that it began to see results."

As the Internet becomes more versatile, its users become more vulnerable. Cyzap must address the issue of Internet security before its customers can be comfortable about using it as a business tool.

One of its largest security projects to date was helping Sarpy County's MIS department identify its network security risks.

"We used a five-step approach, beginning with analysis of the network design and an audit to determine the vulnerable areas," Raman Khurana said. "From there we developed a security policy that encompassed the needs of all the departments that use the network and helped deploy firewalls and intrusion detection systems.

"Finally, with the MIS department's approval, Cyzap performed an external hack attempt using more than 9,000 well-known hacking methodologies to test the strength of Sarpy County's security posture.

"Security is a growing concern for organizations that want to use the Internet, and for that reason it is just as important to our growth as product development has been."

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