

SD&I FAST50 #3: FOR SECURITYHUNTER CEO MICHAEL ROGERS, A ROCKY ROAD HAS LED TO A DESTINATION OF TREMENDOUS ACHIEVEMENT

Michael Rogers, CEO of Securityhunter, is no stranger to success — his firm was the top-ranked Fast50 company in each of the first two years of these rankings. And while a “slip” to No. 3 is usually not a good thing, Rogers is perfectly happy with how his company performed over the past year. “You don’t have to be first, you just have to meet your expectations for growth,” he says. “It’s all about how you do yourself, not really how everyone else is doing.”

Rogers is also no stranger to adversity. In fact, a look at his roller coaster ride, from a guy facing death threats, \$2 million in personal debt and countless other hardships, to becoming one of the fastest-growing security firms in North America is a testament to his perseverance and trial and error in the often murky business of working with the government.

To understand and learn from Rogers’ success and his insatiable hunger for it, all you have to do is take a look at the road he took to get there.

The Seeds of Success

Rogers started out of college with a job at ADT, where he calls himself “the worst salesman they’ve ever had” — bad enough, in fact, that he decided to go back to school to get his MBA at Cornell University. After achieving his masters, he put two years of working as a bank executive behind him to launch a burglar alarm company. “I started doing burglar alarms because I liked security, and I was inspired by a friend of mine, who at 18 years old ran his own alarm



company out of his dorm at Cornell,” Rogers says.

He started dabbling in covert video services, which fueled the company’s growth in its early years; however, a family tragedy — a still birth — truly set Rogers on his path. “I viewed the time when I didn’t have a son at home as a chance to focus on the business and pretty much dedicate the company to his memory,” Rogers says.

“Burn the Ships”

Rogers created a three-word mantra that for years hung right above his desk: “burn the ships.” He says that during the Peloponnesian Wars, where the Spartans were clashing with the Athenians, the Spartans would attack the Athenians on their island, burn their own ships, and then would have to kill the Athenians to steal their ships to get back off the island. “The philosophy is, there is no retreat,” Rogers explains. “We’re going to move forward,

accomplish our objectives and do what we need to do.”

With that kind of mindset, nothing was going to block his path to success — although there were so many who tried. “Along the way I’ve dealt with federal litigation with a billionaire, death threats, extortion attempts and embezzlement,” Rogers says.

One of the death threats stemmed from his covert surveillance work, where the cameras caught a woman being brutally assaulted. Rogers was informed by a private investigator a couple years later that he had received a death threat note made by cutting individual letters out of a magazine. “One of the notes identified me as the video tech and the guy was going to kill me,” Rogers says. “When you are going after the bad guys, you have to be careful because sometimes they don’t like you — for obvious reasons.”

All the blockades on his path to success meant Rogers had to grow up in a hurry. But more importantly, it stirred a feeling inside him to devote himself to a greater calling. “I would love it because for the most part we would work with a lot of PIs and go after the bad guys, and I found it really exciting and challenging,” Rogers explains. “I love hunting predators basically. Then, along the way, I changed my focus from protecting people to protecting the nation.

“I believe that you shouldn’t be just an oxygen thief if you are living — you should be doing something important,” Rogers continues. “I want to make a difference in our nation. I grew up in the Bronx with all these people who had tattoos on their arm from the death camps — honestly if it wasn’t for America, I would be someplace rotting in the ground. So I have a very fierce patriotism. I view it like a blood debt.”

Protecting the Nation

So Rogers moved away from the dangerous work in covert surveillance and decided to start contracting for security with the government. He worked with a former special forces soldier who helped Rogers with landing GSA contracts — considering Securityhunter’s location in Baltimore, it seemed to make sense; but the real adversity was just getting started.

“I got into the world of federal security, and I would get my ass handed to me,” Rogers says. “I would tell people that the way to find Securityhunter was to go down Lord Baltimore Drive and follow the blood trail — it was brutal.”

“You do these projects and then you learn the lesson, but you don’t really get a chance to always capitalize on it in your next project,” he continues. “So

you’re learning, learning, learning, and it is just so rocky — your face is a pulp, but you just keep going and you hope you don’t fall down and just keep at it.”

And keep at it he did — despite going into more than \$2 million in personal debt to do it; in fact, Rogers endured a stretch of 22 months without a paycheck. He had to sell his car, move into a smaller house, borrow from family and friends, but he would not let his company suffer. “Everything was so bad, but I always paid my vendors, even though I was not getting paid. My D&B (business credit rating) was never bad. So I always protected my vendors, because without them, it’s game over. And I never missed a payroll — I just wasn’t paying myself.”

With things perhaps at their worst, Rogers’ big break came in October 2010, when Securityhunter was awarded an unrestricted \$500,000,000 sole award security services Blanket Purchase Agreement (BPA) by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Program Support Center (PSC) for use by all federal agencies. It was the bolt of lightning that propelled the company to heights even Rogers probably couldn’t imagine.

“By then I was an excellent hunter of business — I knew how to get it and I knew how to lose it,” Rogers says. “I managed to get this huge, monster solo award, which we’ve done about 100 million of already — that has fueled a lot of our growth. We’re not the sub, we are the prime, and I’ve built coalitions of companies so the big boys — the Johnson Controls, PriceWaterhouse and all these other companies — actually work for us. They have their confidence in us and they work with us, and it’s a great relationship.”

That explosive growth was enough to propel Securityhunter to the top of the Fast50 rankings from the program’s inception — and it has snowballed from there. In June 2013, the company was awarded a Multiple Award Contract for physical security and access control for U.S. Navy installations around the world, and this January, Securityhunter was awarded a third option year under the BPA with HHS. “We have a lot of DoD clients — everything from the civilian side like DHS, HHS, EPA and VA to the Army and Navy (on the military side). For the Navy contract, as an example, we are maintaining security systems at two dozen bases — in places from Bahrain, to Afghanistan, to GITMO, to Hawaii, Fort Bragg and others.”

Managing a Unique Company

Considering the amount of government work it has landed, you would think Securityhunter is a huge company — it’s not. Rogers has uniquely positioned the company as a sort of government security delegator. “Mainly what we do is rely on our outstanding subcontractors to do the work, and we serve as quality and program



management and billing,” Rogers explains. That means building key relationships with firms that can serve as subcontractors for these huge government projects. Rogers partners with big companies and small ones — you could probably call him the best friend of the integrator. “It’s building these coalitions — individually we shouldn’t be leading anything, but we put ourselves in a position where the smart money goes with us and those guys win big.

“For our subcontractors, we want to make sure that they are successful and that they want to partner with us,” Rogers continues. “I protect my subs like a lioness or a female bear protecting cubs. I don’t let any harm come to them

because they are doing it for us, and I will always make sure they get paid. They know they are safe with us, and that’s a big deal. Plus we are non-threatening because we are way too small to be able to take any of their accounts. Who’s afraid of a 14-person company?”

Rogers works with larger integrators like Johnson Controls and Intergraph, but he also works with a lot of smaller companies that have great relationships with the end-user. “We’re signing up (smaller) integration firms and helping them succeed because they are really good at what they are doing,” he says. “If you run your shop ethically and the clients love you, then we’ll form a brotherhood.”

Advice to Others

For Rogers, it has been a long road fraught with peril, but obviously for him, the destination justified the journey. Remember that \$2 million in debt? He paid it off in less than a year. “Along the way I started learning because I refused to die,” he says. “I have a military mind, so I see things in war analogies — I execute war strategies that I and others have made up, and I implement those strategies in the business environment.” As far as advice for other companies hoping to accomplish what he has, Rogers’ is simple — it’s the mantra he’s done business by for decades: “Burn the ships,” he says. “Believe that what you are doing is really important. Just be you and stay true to that.”

Paul Rothman is editor-in-chief of SD&I magazine (www.secdealer.com).

For more information on the 2013 and 2014 Fast50 rankings, please visit www.securityinfowatch.com/sdifast50



Company: Securityhunter

Web: www.securityhunter.com

HQ: Baltimore

Principals: Mike Rogers, CEO; Nancy Rogers, President

Year founded: 1988

Number of employees: 14

Residential/Commercial split: 100 percent commercial

Top partners: Johnson Controls, Intergraph Corp., PriceWaterhouse