

Business

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Hanging up on phone waste

Chester firm specializes in eliminating overcharges

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Chester - The toughest part of Robert Weinger's business is convincing people that they need it.

The founder and owner of Communication Research Consultants says he has to pitch a service that people think they're already getting.

"Everybody in the (telecommunications) industry claims to do this for free," Weinger says.

CRC is a telecommunications cost optimization company. In other words, Weinger and his staff analyze companies' phone bills to figure out where companies spend money they don't have to be spending.

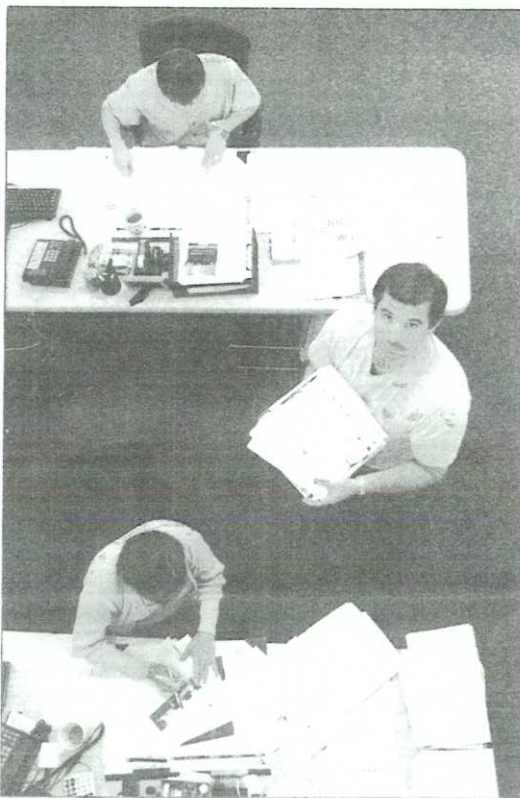
It's like the phone line to nowhere, or the line the phone company charges \$700 for when it should be costing \$250.

"Our job is putting together a puzzle that has no picture and the edges of all the pieces have been chewed by the dog," Weinger says.

The 14-year-old company has worked with thousands of large, international companies like Weight Watchers and Martha Stewart Living, Weinger says, and has saved them hundreds of thousands of dollars yearly.

CRC worked with Hornell's Arizona Beverages about four years ago and saved the company more than \$150,000 annually, said John Posillico, Hornell's director of special projects.

"The problem that a lot of corporate customers have today is,



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Robert Weinger, right, founder of Communications Research Consultants, with two of his project managers: Daniel Casteel, top, and Shellah Brach. Weinger moved his company, which analyzes phone bills for large companies to find ways to save money on communications, from Long Island to Chester two months ago.

that the telecom industry, in the midst of all the deregulation, is undergoing so many changes," Posillico said. "Often times, a company writes checks and sends bills. The phone company, on their part, is faced with unbelievable competition where before they had very little."

Companies may not have the time to look at bills to figure out what they're really paying for.

"Where I think a company like CRC comes into play is in the analysis of what all this mumbo jumbo means," Posillico said.

LARGE COMPANIES, LIKE Arizona Beverages, have 100-page phone

bills. Within the bills are thousands of details.

"We look at every single page of every single phone bill to understand what's going on," Weinger says. "When you're analytical about reading phone bills and you understand it, everything surfaces."

CRC isn't like companies that would be considered competitors because it looks at phone bills manually, Weinger says.

"Every company that sells long distance claims to do what we do," Weinger says.

Weinger and his staff map out a company's phone system to figure out which services are needed and which aren't. Then, because CRC knows so much about the telecom industry, it helps companies it works with change their phone service.

"We pick the brains of the phone company without ever believing what they say," Weinger says. After a few months, - and a few phone bills - CRC can see how much it has saved a company. Then, CRC is paid the difference in bills through the year. If nothing is found, the company doesn't pay CRC anything.

Those in the industry have been working with companies like CRC for years, said Karen Miller, a spokeswoman with Frontier Communications. Miller said her company also makes sure there aren't discrepancies in bills.

"We run our own internal audits, review customer billing to identify any customer billing discrepancies," Miller said. "Our customer care consultants are always available to sit down with a customer who has concerns or doesn't understand their bill."

WITH A BACKGROUND in electronics and about six years in the Navy studying sonar, Weinger started CRC from his home in 1990. Ten years later, he opened an office in Ronkonkoma on Long Island. That's when

Weinger started distancing himself from the company's day-to-day operations.

"I was working in the business too much rather than growing the business," Weinger says.

Weinger and his family moved to Chester in September. When a head employee left the company in January, Weinger decided, instead of working out of the Long Island office himself, he would open up shop here. Now, CRC employs 17 people - six of whom work in Chester - with an

active sales force of about a dozen others. While he has distanced himself from the company a bit and

he is currently entertaining the idea of selling his company, Weinger still insists on training new employees.

"It's my job to instill the culture of the company, the mentality," Weinger says. "Nobody in the world reads phone bills like we do."

As for the future, Weinger isn't focusing on expanding in this area now that he has an office in Chester. But growth, in moderation, is always welcome.

"I don't want to get too big because I think that will be too far in the unknown for me," Weinger says. "I'm very slow. I don't want to explode overnight."

The possibility of selling the company would give Weinger the security and knowledge to expand.

"Other people's ideas and the synergies between the companies that I'm speaking with would enhance my operations," Weinger says. "If a software company was part of my company, I could teach them what can be done to help my process."

Still, Weinger insists that growth should be slow.

"Take baby steps," he says, "and see where it goes."

On the Web:
www.crcglobal.com

Keys to success

These are the keys to the success of Communication Research Consultants, according to its founder, Robert Weinger.

► Treat employees right: "If you hire the best and take care of them, they will produce for the company," Weinger says.

► If a company can retain its employees, the company atmosphere will be positive.

► Do what's right for the client by not straying from the mission (to help clients reduce costs by implementing cost-effective telecommunication solutions that will be easily adaptable for expansion and consolidation as well as industry change) or the vision (to be recognized as the most honest and ethical consulting company in the world).

► Love what you do.

Group of Eight summit Tuesday

The Associated Press

Major business events and economic events scheduled for the coming week (some dates are tentative):

Tomorrow

WASHINGTON - Federal Reserve reports on consumer credit for April. 3 p.m.; Treasury bill auction, 2 p.m.

HOUSTON - Jury selection begins for six former Enron Corp. and Merrill Lynch & Co. employees accused of helping Enron inflate its earnings.

Tuesday

SEA ISLAND, Ga. - President Bush arrives

week ahead!

to host the annual summit of Group of Eight leading industrial nations. Through June 10.

Wednesday

KANSAS CITY, Mo. - H&R Block Inc. releases fourth-quarter earnings.
SMITHFIELD, Va. - Smithfield Foods Inc. releases fourth-quarter earnings.

NEW YORK - Tommy Hilfiger Corp. releases fourth-quarter earnings.

Thursday

WASHINGTON - Labor Department reports on weekly jobless claims, 8:30 a.m.; Treasury reports on federal budget for May, 2 p.m.; Freddie Mac, the mortgage company, reports on mortgage rates.

Friday

WASHINGTON - Commerce Department reports on international trade for April, 8:30 a.m.; Labor Department reports on producer price index for May, 8:30 a.m.