

# It Recently Celebrated Its 10th Year, Fixed Manitoba's Park Reservation System and is Building a Global Presence as a Problem Solver

## AN INSIDE LOOK AT PROTEGRA'S APPROACH TO STRATEGIC PLANNING

Protegra has risen from the humble beginnings of a three-person company run out of a basement to a 75-person firm headquartered in a modern 24,000-square-foot Global Solution Centre. The Manitoba-based company now has branch offices in San Diego and Toronto; serves clients in Canada, the U.S., Europe, Japan and Bermuda; and its revenue will approach \$8 million in 2008.

And it has accomplished all this in only a decade, celebrating its 10th year in 2008.

Others are noticing Protegra's success. It's often been ranked as one of Manitoba's 50 Fastest Growing Companies by *Manitoba Business Magazine* and one of Canada's fastest growing companies by *Profit Magazine*.

Originally set up to develop software, Protegra extended its services to include business performance consulting and process improvement when it discovered clients were getting the technology they ordered, but not always the results they expected.

"Sometimes clients jumped to the solution before identifying the problem," explains Ibrahim Wadood, Protegra's CEO and the only original founder still with the company. "But no amount of software, no matter how sophisticated, could increase sales, production or service if the technology and business processes were not aligned."

"Alignment" figures prominently in Ibrahim's words. He says the success of any strategic plan largely depends on its ability to align three key questions that need to be asked constantly: 1) Is the initiative going to add value for the client? 2) Will it be valuable to the employees? and 3) Is it wasteful in any way?



Ibrahim is the first to acknowledge there is nothing earth-shattering in that recipe for success. "It is easy to say, sounds good and makes you feel good," he explains, "But in day-to-day operations you have to make decisions and it becomes difficult."

Of the three, the key ingredient may well be empowering employees. "It begins and ends with your people," says Ibrahim.

For example, while many companies have their executive teams go off site to do strategic planning, Protegra does the exact opposite. It solicits all its employees as to trends, compiles and rationalizes the results, then divides the company into focus groups that, with the assistance of in-house facilitators (such is the benefit of being a company that offers strategic services), come up with strategies.

Anybody in the company may participate in as many of the focus groups as they like or none at all.

Giving everybody a voice provides a wide range of benefits: it aligns where the company is going and where the employees are going; gives the company the best ideas (those closest to the action usually know best); builds teamwork; and gives people a sense of purpose beyond just doing a job.

In fact, "lack of communication" is one of the main reasons strategic plans fail. When this happens the temptation is to raise either the frequency or the decibel level of the communications. "Most CEO's think 'My message isn't getting through so I am going to send out another email, another memo,'" says Ibrahim. "But communication is a two-way street and you have to make sure the receiver really feels part of the process so they aren't tuning you out."

Protegra paves this "two-way street" throughout the year.

First, the company's culture, principles and practices are documented so people know what the expectations are. A weekly in-house newsletter and monthly meetings share all kinds of data to ensure everyone stays up to date with what is going on in the company.

The second part of the equation is continuing the stream of employee feedback, something Protegra does in many ways.

An employee committee has an open door policy, but it doesn't just wait for feedback. Each member of the committee is assigned a portion of the company and approaches each employee within that section.

At the end of every contract Protegra has a close-out session that looks at what happened, what worked, what didn't, and what new ideas occurred.

It also does 360-degree feedback so everybody gets to evaluate everyone they interact with.

Collectively, these efforts put Protegra in a position to provide high value to clients in an incredibly efficient way — something that came in handy when it fixed Manitoba's custom-developed Parks Reservation System.

The reservation system was under heavy criticism from campers and the tourism industry. Indeed, the members of the Manitoba Chambers passed a Resolution calling for action.

To its credit, the government agreed to revamp the system and Protegra led a consortium comprised of Function Four Ltd., ManLab Resources Inc., Nex Technologies Corp. and ID Fusion Software to get the job done.

"We were warned the system could not be delivered in less than 12 months," smiles Ibrahim. "We did it in three."

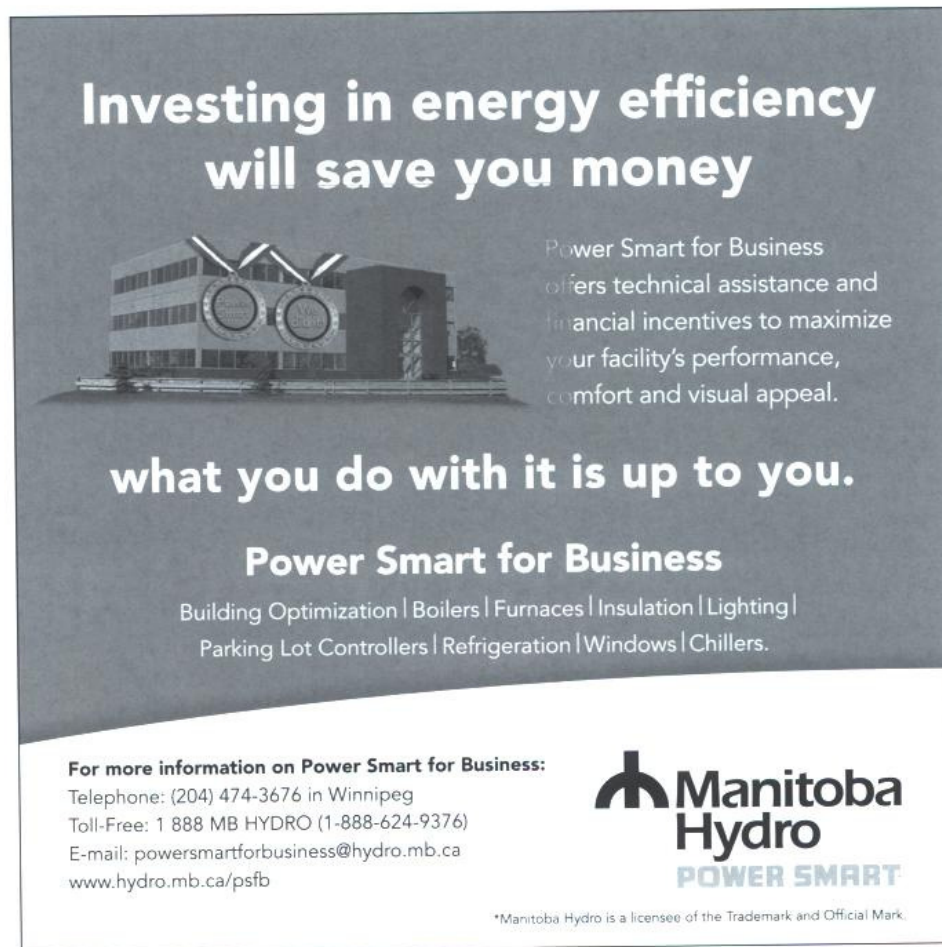
The new online reservation system is a huge success and earned Protegra the 2006 Project of the Year award from the Manitoba chapter of the Project Management Institute.

While Protegra does a lot to empower employees it won't add layers of bureaucracy to prevent bad behaviour. "Most people want to contribute," Ibrahim says. "We don't create policies that focus on the one or two per cent that are bad apples."

Nor does the company automatically eject people they are having a problem with. "There could be a number of reasons why a good employee is doing questionable things," says Ibrahim. "We try to look at the root cause of any problem — are there family issues, are they dissatisfied with their work? We try to fix the problem before reaching the conclusion that the person is just a bad fit."

The ultimate example of Protegra's dedication to two-way communication is its commitment to ask not only what the employee can do for the company but what Protegra can do for them. "We like to say at Protegra, 'The world is your oyster. Tell us what you want it to be and what we need to do to make it happen,'" says Ibrahim.

Apparently success, like communication, is a two-way street. ■■■



**Investing in energy efficiency will save you money**

Power Smart for Business offers technical assistance and financial incentives to maximize your facility's performance, comfort and visual appeal.

**what you do with it is up to you.**

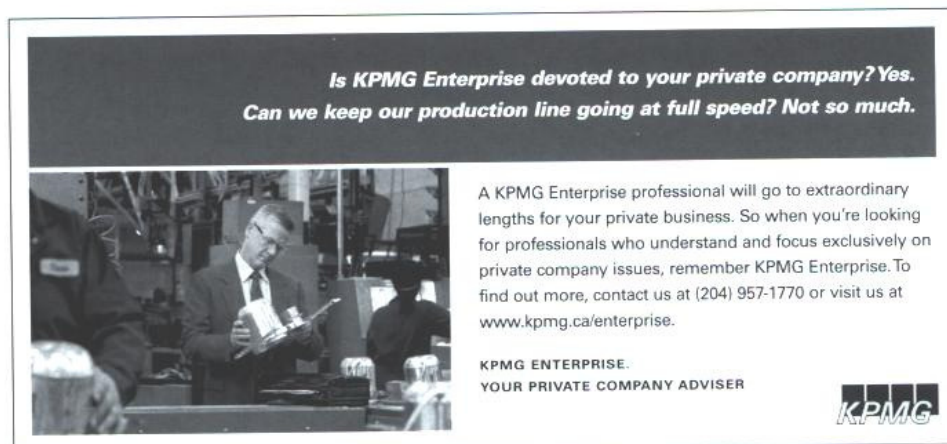
**Power Smart for Business**

Building Optimization | Boilers | Furnaces | Insulation | Lighting |  
Parking Lot Controllers | Refrigeration | Windows | Chillers.

**For more information on Power Smart for Business:**  
Telephone: (204) 474-3676 in Winnipeg  
Toll-Free: 1 888 MB HYDRO (1-888-624-9376)  
E-mail: powersmartforbusiness@hydro.mb.ca  
www.hydro.mb.ca/psfb

**Manitoba Hydro**  
POWER SMART

\*Manitoba Hydro is a licensee of the Trademark and Official Mark.



**Is KPMG Enterprise devoted to your private company? Yes. Can we keep our production line going at full speed? Not so much.**

A KPMG Enterprise professional will go to extraordinary lengths for your private business. So when you're looking for professionals who understand and focus exclusively on private company issues, remember KPMG Enterprise. To find out more, contact us at (204) 957-1770 or visit us at [www.kpmg.ca/enterprise](http://www.kpmg.ca/enterprise).

**KPMG ENTERPRISE.**  
YOUR PRIVATE COMPANY ADVISER

