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## Seeing upside in business downturn, RMD Advertising looks to expand

**THE FIRM HAS** signed five new clients as it works toward a goal of dramatically growing its business over the next two years.

BY KEVIN KEMPER | BUSINESS FIRST

When Sue Reninger has a bad day, she only has to look outside her offices to realize how much she has accomplished.

But Reninger also realizes she faces a lot more work ahead if she wants her advertising and public relations agency to attain the goal she recently set for it.

Reninger, majority owner of Columbus-based RMD Advertising, is in the same Cleveland Avenue business park where she started in 1992. But she's moved to larger

offices to accommodate the agency's 14 employees, up from two workers when she started.

Reninger hopes the agency soon will be larger.

"Our goal is to get to 20 employees this year and 50 by the end of 2010," said Reninger, the firm's managing partner.

### POWER OF POSITIVE THINKING

RMD is embarking on its expansion plan in the middle of an economic downturn, banking on new business to expand its client and employee rosters. The agency last year posted about \$1 million in capitalized billings. By the end of 2008, the firm should double



**S. Reninger:** Hopes company more than doubles by 2010.

that and reach \$5 million by 2010, Reninger estimated.

Reninger and Donn Ditzhazy, the agency's executive creative director and minority owner, decided to build a growth fire under the company late last year. They haven't looked back.

"What you focus on becomes reality," Reninger said.

In the second quarter, the agency added five clients - Cooperative Business International Inc., Dei Fratelli Products, Quick Solutions Inc., Casnet Technology Solutions and Hot Mamma Foods Inc.

But RMD lost its Glory Foods Inc. account in May.



**Business:** Advertising and public relations agency

**Based:** Columbus

**Managing partner:** Sue Reninger

**Executive creative di-**

**rector:** Donn Ditzhazy

**Employees:** 14

**2007 revenue:** Approximately \$1 million

**Web site:** rmdadvertising.com

Of its new clients, two fit especially well into RMD's food and manufacturing niches, Reninger said. Dei Fratelli is a Toledo-based producer of canned tomato products, and Hot Mamma is a producer of frozen Italian cheese bread also from Toledo.

Food-related clients, whose business isn't as cyclical as other industries, can be particularly valuable to advertising agencies during downturns in the economy, said David Dennis, president of Columbus-based SBC Advertising Ltd. Merchants who give consumers low-priced food options are a good example, he said.

Dennis should know. SBC works with the Subway sandwich chain, which is seeing an increase in business.

"Every recession is different from every other recession," he said. "In this one, if you have banking, real estate and housing clients, you're getting hit hard."

### TIMING IS RIGHT

Reninger figures now is the time for her agency to expand, if recent history can be a guide. When the technology bubble burst in late 2000, leading to a short-lived recession the following year, many companies took their advertising business to smaller, cheaper agencies, Reninger recalled. She's hoping now may also be time to snag talent from other agencies that are paring their work forces.

That may be easier said than done, said Brooks Young, an advertising industry recruiter in Columbus.

"There is plenty of talent out there, but finding it at the right price point is the challenge," said the operating partner of Executive Search Partners Inc.

A small agency such as RMD sometimes faces difficulty attracting workers who have been dismissed from larger firms because its roster of clients is smaller, fueling a perception that there are fewer creative opportunities, Young said. But that can be offset by a competitive pay package, he added.

"I think that right at this moment, given the economy and what's going on, for an agency that has financial backing it's a good time to go out and snag some people," Young said.

For RMD to reach its goal of 50 employees, more capital likely will be required, Reninger said. That could mean bringing in another partner, she said, or even purchasing or merging with another agency.

"All options," she said, "are being considered."

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