



SAFETY GUARD: Former FBI agent Hector Ruiz has grown his one-man security services shop to a 500-employee operation.

IDEAS IN ACTION

Playing it safe

AFTER 15 YEARS OF STEADY, "NATURAL" GROWTH, **RUIZ PROTECTIVE SERVICE INC.** HOPES A NEW PRODUCT — AND MARKETING STRATEGY — WILL TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

BY JENNIFER GORDON | CORRESPONDENT

BIGGEST PROBLEM

Ruiz Protective Service Inc. has grown by word-of-mouth for 14 years, but with big contracts out for bid and a new product in development, Hector Ruiz, president, aims to create an in-house marketing department to take his company to the next level.

Over the past 14 years, Ruiz Protective Service Inc. has grown from one-man operation providing polygraph services to a 500-employee company with \$12 million in annual revenue. Led by Hector Ruiz, a former FBI agent and police officer, the company provides armed and unarmed security guards, performs polygraph examinations and drug and background checks, and monitors sex offenders.

"It has evolved in a natural way," says Ruiz, who launched the company in 1994.

Making the leap from government employee to entrepreneur was very challenging, he says. To help, he sought the advice of an

attorney and certified public accountant, and hired other people to manage areas in which he was unfamiliar.

"There are many things that you think you know because you observed them from afar," Ruiz says. "It is very different when you suddenly have to do them. I'm smart enough to know what areas I'm not very bright in. If you're smarter than I am, I want you on my team."

Getting involved with the Hispanic Contractors Association also was crucial to growing the business, he said. The association suggested that Ruiz pursue drug testing and background investigation opportunities to meet the needs of groups such as the Dallas Independent School Dis-

trict. At the time, only one company in Dallas offered those services, Ruiz says.

"We became the second and that actually benefited our company significantly," he says.

Over the past 14 years, the company has grown almost exclusively through referrals, and Ruiz has just added people and services as needed. But now it finds itself at a crossroads. Ruiz Protective Services has become a sizable organization — with 500 employees — but it has no formal marketing plan to take things to the next level.

The security guard division just submitted bid proposals that could triple the company's annual revenue of \$12 million.

RUIZ, P24

NEWS

RUIZ: New polygraph technology could "revolutionize" monitoring programs

FROM PAGE 23

What's more, Ruiz is developing a new polygraph technology that he hopes could "revolutionize the way that people convicted of sexual offenses" can be monitored. Ruiz said he hopes to have a patent on the product soon and expects it could be ready to sell within a year.

To help manage these new opportunities, Ruiz has begun work to create a new marketing department that will be staffed in house. As with all of Ruiz's hires, he said the most important characteristics are team players and people who have "the vision to see the possibilities." He hopes to have a marketing manager on board within six months,

so plans could be developed before the new product rolls out.

Joseph Picken, executive director for the Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship at the University of Texas at Dallas said that almost all business owners face the moment when the question is whether to add staff with specialized capabilities. "It's a judgment call; it varies with every business," he said.

Timing often becomes the concern. "The risk is that if you don't have all the skills and capabilities that you need, it can become a source of failure," he said.

Up until now, Ruiz's company has grown off his contacts and existing client referrals. "Most of our growth has come from word of mouth," he says. "We're so accustomed

to if we do a good job we'll be recommended. Now that we've matured as a company we really do need a formal marketing program."

Picken said that it sounds like what the company needs is "to move from an opportunistic platform toward a more professionalized management structure." The challenge will be to keep the entrepreneurial culture that has helped the company grow so far, he said.

"You don't want to constrain and control the business too much so that you lose your growth momentum," Picken said. "But on the other hand, you've got to have some control."

GORDON is a Dallas-based writer.

SAFE KEEPING

NAME: Ruiz Protective Service Inc.
BUSINESS: Security and safety services
HEADQUARTERS: 10939 Shady Trail, Ste. A, Dallas 75220
OWNERSHIP: Private
TOP EXECUTIVE: Hector Ruiz, president and owner
EMPLOYEES: 486
ANNUAL REVENUE: \$12 million (2007)
PHONE: 214-306-7551
WEB: www.ruizservices.com