

Austin Family Business Program

Micro Category Finalist

Timmco Insurance, Inc.

Insurance agency evolves with the times

John Timm's father didn't drag him into the family insurance business. He eagerly campaigned for the job.

Timm, now the president of Timmco Insurance Inc. in Northeast Portland, wasn't always high on the insurance industry. As a youngster, it seemed neither exciting nor easy.

But as his college education progressed, he realized that doctors, lawyers, insurance agents and other professionals are all in the same business.

"Everything is selling. You're selling yourself," he says. "My father was a person who cared about people, who cared about his customers. As a young person, you have a desire to help others. For some, that means joining the Peace Corps or working with a ministry. For me, it happened to be insurance."

In an era where the number of independent agents has dwindled in response to competition from the Internet and direct marketing, Timmco Insurance has grown to a nine-person office. Once the firm gets a client, it keeps it.

"Is the personal touch still wanted, needed? We think it is. It's an honor to say that my first customer is still a customer today."

Four generations of Timm's family have been employed in the insurance industry. John Timm's maternal grandmother, Libby Orthman, was the elevator operator at a Wisconsin insurance company. His father, Bill Timm started Timmco in 1970 after a long career with Sentry Insurance. John joined the company in 1975, and his son, Brian Timm, and daughter, Susie Ames, both work in the company today.

Also vital to the business is Andy Rosson, Timmco's vice president and a 21-year veteran of the company, and his son, Bob Rosson, a former auditor for the state of Washington who serves as CFO.

"We're double rich, I think," says Timm. "And



The Timmco Insurance family: (from left) Agent Susie Ames, President John Timm, Vice President Andy Rosson, CFO Bob Rosson, Agent Brian Timm.

you have to add to that the rest of the people we work with. We think it's the story of three families — the Rossons, the Timms and our colleagues in the office."

Timm's father insisted that he go outside the company to get some experience before hiring him. So John spent three years as an insurance claims adjuster before approaching his father for a job.

"I said, 'This could be a beneficial exchange of information. I've got experience in the claims adjustment field, and you know sales.'"

Similarly, Brian and Susie got outside work experience before coming to Timmco. Brian worked five years as a workers compensation claims examiner and Susie worked at Nationwide as a claims adjuster.

They've added new ideas and energy to the company, says Timm, mentioning the iPhone that he now carries around at the urging of his son.

"It has all of my customers information on it," he marvels. "Sometimes the leading generation ought to listen to the succeeding generation's advice."

Things have changed significantly in the insurance business over the past generation. In the

old days, customers wouldn't call an agent in the off hours because they thought it would be too much of an imposition.

Today, Timm is on call 24-7. It is connectivity that the today's customer demands — and deserves — he adds.

"You don't need to talk to your insurance agent very often, but when you do, it's very important."

Family bonds strengthen Timmco Insurance, not weaken it, says Timm. If the business fails in the future, it won't be because the company's younger generation drops the ball. The determining factor in the company's long-term success is whether young people today will choose to switch from price-oriented to customer-service oriented insurance agents as they age, as baby boomers have.

"Our success," he says, "is a matter of the marketplace."

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