

From Challenge to Competitive Advantage



The Situation

Ritter Communications, a successful, century-old communications company with locations in Arkansas and throughout the Mid-south began with just a single phone exchange. It now features a multi-state fiber-optic network of over 3,000 miles, making Ritter Communications a prominent regional player offering services including Internet and ethernet bandwidth, voice, video, and cloud-based solutions to its residential, business, and wholesale customer base. After years of rapid growth, Ritter took on its greatest challenge to date in 2012 with the acquisition of the Millington Telephone and Millington Cable companies, doubling their residential and business subscribership.

"With the Millington acquisition, we were now managing more geographies, more channel lineups, different accounting structures and more complicated support processes," said Trent Taylor, Hometown Services Product Manager for Ritter.

The Challenges

"In the years leading up to 2012, video product management had entered into an extreme state of transition: programming costs had begun rapidly increasing, retransmission consent added new costs and complexity and consumer options for Internet-delivered video solutions multiplied significantly," said Taylor.

When the company combined these transitional challenges with additional content, more geographies, and wide-ranging customer service expectations, it began to feel a bit daunting.

As the integration of the Millington companies began, customer service was top of mind for Ritter management. "We knew we had to create a seamless experience for our customers in order to provide them with the Ritter standard of service," said Jane Marie Woodruff, Director of Marketing. "The additional cycles required to manage the integration along with creating and deploying new processes for our frontline teams became overwhelming. We decided that bringing in additional expertise was in the best interest of our customers."

The Solution

Following a recommendation from industry peers, the Ritter team reached out to Cheryl Summers, Founder and Partner at Leverage Broadband Strategies, a management and growth firm for telecom companies. Leverage takes on everything from merger and acquisition support to subscriber analytics to contract negotiations and video subscription services – even serving as an outsourced management team.

The Leverage Broadband Strategies team helped decode the complexity in managing widely varying packaging and programming relationships for Ritter. They mapped out a plan to begin standardizing product offerings within contractual guidelines, and worked with the Ritter team to create training materials to make the transition easier on their customer service personnel. They helped to successfully manage the integration of Millington for Ritter.

The Results

Since 2012, Ritter has partnered with Leverage for services ranging from programming management to contract negotiation and programmer payment processing, bringing Leverage in as a consultant for package and pricing development, and for new product development including the Ritter 2018 IPTV launch.

Over time, Leverage has helped Ritter to create a streamlined offering that capitalizes on opportunities to improve margins within its services. "The cost savings alone that Leverage has helped us to implement have greatly exceeded anything we expected," Taylor said. "They are unquestionably one of our most valuable strategic partners."

"The longer we have our relationship with Leverage, the more valuable the relationship has proven to become," added Woodruff.

Summers noted that Leverage brings perspective to each client. "Not only do we offer our own direct industry experience, but we also have a broad range of service provider clientele that keep us apprised on key industry metrics and best practices," she said. "This creates immensely valuable insight by which to guide our entire client base."

Although many telecommunications companies have struggled through various industry transitions, Ritter has consistently outperformed comparable companies, even experiencing revenue growth in recent years. Ritter leadership points to contributions from Leverage. "Leverage has played a strong role in these outcomes," said Susan Christian, Vice President of Marketing at Ritter. "Leverage fights hard for us when negotiating retransmission consent agreements and other affiliation agreements. In addition to the increased performance of our subscription services, Leverage has uncovered a number of accounting errors by our programmers that have resulted in multiple large credits being returned to us directly."

