

# Raising the bar

How Dan Sanker developed better supply chain logistics solutions to grow CaseStack Inc. **By Anne-Margaret Sobota**

**D**an Sanker knew there was a better way for companies to manage their supply chains, and he set out to prove it with CaseStack Inc.

With his Internet-based network, companies are better able to consolidate operations, access information and save on shipping costs.

"Our systems decide how best to deliver goods," says Sanker, CEO of the Santa Monica-based supply chain logistics outsourcing company. "Clients use (our system) to better predict future demand so they can manufacture the right amount to meet future orders, or so they can load the warehouses with the right amount of product. This reduces out of stocks and reduces inventory carrying costs."

The company grew from \$24 million in revenue in 2004 to \$35 million in 2005.

*Smart Business* spoke with Sanker about what sets his company apart and how he plans to continue its rapid growth.

**Q: How do you distinguish yourself from your competitors?**

We are firm believers in the concept of collaboration as a tool to reduce costs and build sales. The industry has not been well-known for collaborating with trading partners, but we're really trying to do that.

We have a technology platform; there's nothing like it in the industry. For example, we have a series of optimizers that each and every transportation or warehouse (transaction) feeds through to determine the least-cost, highest-service alternative. It's easy to use. It's easy to integrate with. And it has a lot of functionality, and that's critical.

Every time we upgrade anything for one client, we just upgraded it for every client, and nobody has to do anything. And that's a pretty big competitive advantage as well.

Our goal for next year is to double the size of this company.

**Q: How are you preparing to meet that goal?**

It requires a constant vigilance to

issues I mentioned before. It's almost like we've been restructuring for six years because we want to keep growing. The minute we stop for a quarter, there will be implications to that.

We've ... restructured the (organizational) chart quite a bit, so there's different roles that exist, there's different people in the roles.

Beefing up customer service is a huge one. I really value a higher level of customer service and leveling the playing



field for our clients. We all need to have a very sort of 'dog with a bone' attitude as far as customer service goes. It's not easy to keep that, and I think this is a year for us to really renew that.

Some of it is just culture. We need to actually care about every customer's shipment like it mattered to us because it was our shipment. It comes down to that level of detail. Every single shipment needs to matter. It's a cultural thing where you try to empathize with customers.

**Q: How do you maintain that attitude as you grow?**

I don't think it's a kind of manual-driven type thing. It goes beyond just training, but there is a training aspect. There are some people that can't grasp it, and unfortunately, they can't stay.

If they stay, they will, over time, deteriorate the culture.

It's something that's very difficult because you have to constantly readdress the issue. It's not a small issue, but it's a lot of small nuances every day. It's easy to just brush them under the rug. And you don't always get to them as fast as you probably should, but it's one of those issues that you really have to take a hard look at every once in a while.

**Q: How do you enable employees to contribute to the success of the company?**

We constantly restructure things. There's certain things people like to do and they're good at, and instead of trying to make them do things all the time that they don't like and they're not good at ... why not try to put them in positions where they are set up to succeed?

The way to do it is to let people get some multifunctional experience. One, it helps them find their niche. Two, it gives them broader exposure so that whatever job they do next, they're probably better at it. Because if you move from an operations role to a sales role to an accounting role to an engineering role ... then you're going to be a better manager, and eventually we're going to be able to promote you.

I really want to get people to have good career paths and to get the experience they need. It's really management's job to make sure that people have a path above them. It means they may need to take a break and do some other thing for a while.

**HOW TO REACH:** CaseStack, [www.casestack.com](http://www.casestack.com)