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## DALE STEIN

### From fiercely independent teenage milkman to telecom expert

By PADMA NAGAPPAN

Special to The Daily Transcript

Dale Stein grew up as a middle child in a family of six children, the son of a journeyman lineman father and librarian mother, in a small town southwest of Chicago that had a population of less than 2,000.

His background served as an early influence, infusing him with a fierce work ethic and determination to make his own way in the world.



"When I was 10, I used to pick wild berries that I sold to people, later I had a paper route, then I did milk delivery — I was always independent," Stein said.

By the time he was 15, he was working full-time and paying his way through a private Catholic boys' high school, since he felt the education he would get at the small high school in town — with less than a hundred students — would not be good.

He woke up at 2 a.m. every day and delivered milk bottles until it was time to head for school.

"I wanted freedom, and I thought having money would give me that freedom," he said,

explaining his motivation to work those hours. "I was very observant as a kid, decided very early on that I didn't want to work for anyone else but myself."

When he was in college at DeVry University in Chicago, he read about alarm companies and decided it had future potential, so he began his career at Westinghouse Alarms. His work ethic served him well, and he became the top sales person his first year at the firm.

At 23 years old, he was made general manager of the company's New York office. He came to San Diego a year later in 1974, to work at the firm's dealership, WestTec.

Eventually, he became CEO of WestTec, and then he and his partners bought out a subsidiary security company, which they grew manifold before selling it several years later.

In his early 30s, Stein ventured into land development and built apartments and homes until the early 1990s when a recession hit.

This prompted Stein to go back into the telecom business with a friend, and he acquired a 40 percent stake in a struggling company called INET, which specialized in phone systems, voice mail and data networks.

He successfully turned it around, and when he sold it in 2000, sales had grown from \$1 million to \$18 million.

The serial entrepreneur then began Technology Assurance Group (TAG National), a for-profit membership group that offered marketing, sales and financial training for voice, data and telecom companies, focusing on business strategy and best practices.

In the process, Stein and his partners decided it was time to get back in the business themselves, instead of just advising and training members on tapping opportunities. With that in mind, they bought a stake in **Voice Smart Networks**, a member company, with the idea of expanding it from Ventura to Los Angeles, Orange County and San Diego.

Voice Smart Networks installs and maintains computer networks and voice systems for small and medium enterprises.

Stein has big plans — he wants to position it to do \$10 million in business, at which point he'll go on an acquisition spree, and when it reaches \$20 million a year, he has his eye on a national rollout.

In describing himself, he said: "I try to make deals that are fair to both sides. I give more than I take, and that's a great way to live."

~ Nagappan is a San Diego-based freelance writer.

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## Internet abuse can kill a company: What can you do about it?



Allowing open Internet access to any and all technology can reduce productivity, expose the network to security threats, jam up bandwidth, deteriorate the quality of service in IP-based applications and slow down critical programs that are running the business.

Yet most organizations are mitigating these risks by establishing what are called Acceptable Use Policies (AUPs). Also known as policies of utilization, these are simply a set of rules and procedures by which all employees must adhere to when interacting with technology. By now, large companies are expected to utilize AUPs, and small to medium-sized businesses (SMBs) are beginning to see the value in establishing a set of policies in their own right.

One scenario that AUPs address is which software employees should be able to access during work. One suggested policy is that employees should be able to access whatever software they need in order to become more productive, as long as they receive approval from the IT department. This is one of the safest policies to have in place, but it is also one of the most time-consuming to enforce. One way to get around this obstacle is to utilize a technology adviser who can recommend specific programs and applications to use, and which ones to avoid.

Unless you're working with an abundance of IT resources, many companies are looking to outsource these sorts of mundane procedures to Managed Service Providers (MSPs) at a much lower cost. Business owners are usually thrilled with these sorts of changes because their employees can now spend less time performing brainless Microsoft Office installations, and more time working on their primary objectives.

The Internet is another key area that needs to be regulated, because SMBs need to make sure they're not exposing themselves to security breaches.

According to Businessweek.com, 70 percent of Internet porn traffic occurs between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Aside from its vulgar nature, this sort of content is plagued with all sorts of dangerous viruses, spyware and malware.

SMBs can examine a few different steps to start to get back on track. First, the obvious sites need to be blocked; this means anything that contains obscene, hateful, pornographic, unlawful, violent or illegal materials. Second, sites that require large amounts of streaming data (ex: sites that stream television, videos or music) need to be monitored all the way down to the appliance and the system needs to automatically dump users off these sites if network performance is threatened. Similar capabilities should be required for social networking sites like Facebook and Myspace, as they are detrimental to productivity and are huge distractions.

The key to establishing a successful policy is creating one that is complete, efficient and moves with the development of new technology. At the end of the day, its purpose is to safeguard the company from risks and propel the company forward to a brighter, more profitable future.

Submitted by Dale Stein, CEO of Voice Smart Networks.  
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Courtesy photo

Dale Stein, CEO of Voice Smart Networks.

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