

BUSINESS TOOLS

DSA overcomes negative perceptions of industry

BY LOU CORSARO

As an automation engineering firm, Data Science Automation works with a diverse customer base — “anyone who makes, tests or designs products,” said Richard Brueggman, founder, president and CEO.

That means DSA assigns job resources to a company’s task, completes it and walks away. This can mean providing everything from a one-day consult to complicated, long-term projects. Unfortunately, that business model can get a bad rap.

“We’re fighting a negative perception and a lack of credibility in the industry. Where an employee might feel threatened by us, there’s issues of job insecurity,” he said.

For Brueggman, this was troubling, in part, because he prided DSA on being a company that raised standards and reduced client risk. Rather than be defensive, his response was simply to convince companies DSA was worth their time.

“Everybody’s got an engineering degree,” Brueggman said. “I taught for years at (Carnegie Mellon University) and have an advanced degree myself, and strongly believe education is important in industry. We kind of take that to heart here. I force everyone down



JOE WLOJCIK

Richard Brueggman is founder, president and CEO of Data Science Automation, based in McMurray.

certification paths to keep everything up to date.”

Another component was to offer training to its clients, something Brueggman said most companies like DSA don’t do.

“We decided early on it would make a lot of sense to make our customers as self-sufficient with these tools as they deem necessary,” he said. “Every day, we’re essentially doing what could put us out of business by making (clients) successful on their own.”

DSA also hosts certified training centers at its facilities, with certified professional instructors.

“That helped a significant amount to penetrate more accounts, because it really lowered our clients’ defenses,” Brueggman said. “Where some people thought they would be losing their job, now they realize we’re here to help them do their jobs better.”

The approach, he said, does not mean they lack for repeat business.

Data Science Automation

Automation engineering firm

BASED: McMurray

FOUNDED: 1996

EMPLOYEES: 100

REVENUE: \$10 million

WEBSITE: dsautomation.com

■ **CHALLENGE:** Fighting negative perceptions and credibility issues around being a company that does projects for other companies.

■ **SOLUTION:** Raise the company’s professional standard for its employees, and teach clients and their employees how to do the work.

“It’s worked out to our favor because they get self-sufficiency, but we get harder projects down the line,” Brueggman said. “We make our code available to them, we teach them how we architect the code, teach them how to modify it, and will sell them the tools to go it alone.”

In fact, despite the recent recession, DSA has reported 125 percent revenue growth over the past three years.

Doing that kind of business, though, does mean creating relationships with a lot of trust.

“If you love them, set them free, and they’ll come back. We don’t hold a gun to their head, keep all the source code and

charge them \$10 million or something,” Brueggman said.

The company also earns trust in “the fact that we teach for a living literally hundreds of students every year. And we are good at it,” he said.

Kelly Hunt, executive director of the Entrepreneurial Leadership Center and Student Incubator at California University of Pennsylvania, said the school tried to offer its technological prowess to a company and found the negative perceptions to be true. It was a quickly expanding company unable to piece their technology together quickly enough so they could process data. The idea was to use both faculty and students.

“The company was excited and, as we started, we ran into a lot of walls with the employees, especially in the IT department,” she said. “They were very territorial. They didn’t want to share their information. They almost were embarrassed we had been called into fix something they thought was theirs.”

Hunt said they didn’t foresee the problem, so they didn’t come in to educate the way DSA does.

“We didn’t try to push them over, either,” she said. “But I think that maybe that would have taken care of (the problem).”