

Internet watchdog guards brands online

MarkMonitor grows 150 percent in 4 years

"We start with the domain and extend to brand protection and help protect against identity theft," says Salim.

BY LEENA RAO

San Francisco Business Times

CEO Irfan Salim is taking San Francisco-based corporate brand protection and online fraud prevention agency MarkMonitor global.

Despite a recession, Salim sees tremendous growth in international expansion. In 2007, the company opened European operations in London and saw new business grow by nearly 30 percent.

In this year alone, MarkMonitor raised \$23 million in funding while looking to acquire an existing company or start business operations in the Asia Pacific region in 2009.

"What it comes down to is that if you are going to run a healthy company in the U.S. market, you have to look internationally," said Salim. "You need to have a healthy balance of diverse business if you want to be global — and the Internet is worldwide."

The company's revenue grew from \$19 million in 2005 to a projected \$50 million in 2008, with clients such as Nokia, FedEx and UBS helping the company to top 150 percent growth in the past four years. Of the firm's 220 employees worldwide, roughly half work from the 18,500-square-foot SoMa office. The rest are in London, Washington, D.C., New York and Boise, Idaho.

MarkMonitor ambitiously fights and defends companies' brands on the Internet. Salim said the company's growth is also due to the increase in security breaches and identity theft over the Internet. He points to the company's online brand protection

SNAPSHOT:

MarkMonitor Inc.

Location: San Francisco.

CEO: Irfan Salim.

Founder: Faisal Shah.

2005 revenue: \$19 million.

2006 revenue: \$29 million.

2007 revenue: \$38 million.

2008 revenue: \$50 million (estimated).

Year founded: 1999.

Number of employees: 220.

Web site: MarkMonitor.com

Smartest move: Raising \$23 million in funding this year.

Key challenge: Making sure we have the right team and ensuring that employees are happy.

Future plans: Expand to the Asia Pacific region.

and anti-phishing business, which grew by 60 percent over the past year. Phishing refers to the fraudulent entities who imitate legitimate companies in emails to convince people to share user names, personal information, credit card numbers and passwords.

Originally founded by lawyer Faisal Shah in 1999 to help protect corporate trademarks, MarkMonitor has slowly added more services, acquiring a domain management business in 2001 and adding an online brand protection operation a few years ago. Salim joined MarkMonitor in 2006 after spending 20 years leading Internet security companies, including Zone Labs and NameSecure.com.

MarkMonitor's variety of services under one company helps it compete in the anti-phishing and brand protection industry.

"Our solutions are comprehensive. We start with the domain and extend to brand protection and help

protect against identity theft," Salim explained.

Clients have come to count on its services. Lori Rogan, trademark manager for Acushnet Golf, the owner of the Titleist, Footjoy, Cobra and Pinnacle brands, said that the company could not keep up with the policing of counterfeit production and online auctions of the company's golf products. In 2005, Acushnet signed a deal with MarkMonitor to help streamline its online brand protection efforts. To date, MarkMonitor has helped Acushnet shut down 14,001 infringing auctions and listings.

"MarkMonitor understands the unique needs of each customer," Rogan said. And they have saved the company a lot of time and money, she added.

MarkMonitor's success and growth bring operational challenges, Salim said. The company must work to find and keep talented employees in the job-jumping

culture of Silicon Valley. "In the technology business, our fundamental asset is our people and the problem is how to maintain quality."

The company also feels the pressure to be constantly innovative.

"From a management standpoint, there is a challenge of sifting through all the technology and ideas and finding which one to pick and stay focused on," Salim said. "There is an art to keeping up with technology."

Salim hopes to use \$23 million in a rainy-day funds to license additional technologies in the next few years. And the company is looking to grow in Asia. Salim credits timing as a key driver in the company's success.

"We are fortunate that we are addressing a market that is currently evolving and emerging at the same time as our technology is growing," Salim said. "Our technology works."

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