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Leaders in Diversity: Top three minority-owned businesses in Greater Baltimore

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The Baltimore Business Journal has released its annual List of top minority-owned companies in Greater Baltimore, ranked by 2017 revenue. Below, learn more about how our top three companies were able to achieve success and what advice they have for other business owners.

Adams Communication & Engineering Technology (ACET)

Founded in 1999, Adams Communication & Engineering Technology (ACET) is a national security company focused on the intelligence community, the Department of Defense, the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Defense Health Agency. The company opened its headquarters in Waldorf in 2005, followed by a Reston, Virginia, location in 2006. In 2011, ACET opened an office at Aberdeen Proving Ground to house its Defense Solutions and Software & Systems Divisions.

Charles Adams, the company's founder and CEO, started his career as an intelligence analyst with the U.S. Army Military Intelligence and later worked for several other companies including Lockheed Martin and BAE Systems before starting ACET. Adams grew the company from a single employee to more than 450 today. While Adams said that credibility was a "major hurdle" for him as a minority business owner, he attributes hiring "smart, equitable staff members with strong value systems" as a major reason for ACET's success.

Adams spoke with the Baltimore Business Journal about his company's work, the future of cybersecurity and what's next for ACET.

Name: [Charles Adams](#)

Title: Founder, chairman and CEO

Age: 57

Education: Bachelor's in computer science, University of Maryland; bachelor's in music education, West Chester University

What is the biggest difference between being a business owner in the IT/cybersecurity world now compared to when you founded ACET nearly 20 years ago?

Cybersecurity is one of the highest concerns for the state of Maryland as well as the entire nation. Twenty years ago, cybersecurity was localized. Now it touches every aspect of the IT industry.

How have you seen Maryland's cyber market grow, and what do you see for the future?

We have seen cyber requirements grow at the federal, state and local government levels, as well as in commercial areas. Cyber will continue to grow in both the defensive and offensive areas. As a result, the demand for Certified Information Systems Security Professional (CISSP) and Certified Ethical Hackers (CEHs) continues to grow.

In your view, what's the greatest cyber threat we are facing today?

We are facing both foreign and domestic cyber threats over the next decade. Our whole infrastructure and business spectrum is integrated with information technology and potential vulnerabilities.

What are you most excited about for the future at ACET?

We have several opportunities to provide greater impact in our nation's defense and for national airspace. We are on two winning teams for the latest Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) initiative related to Unmanned Aerial Systems (UASs), where we will be directly performing analysis, testing, and mitigation actions for cyber threats to UAS's command and control links and software.

What is involved in your day-to-day? How do you balance your time? Do you find it difficult to manage a work-life balance?

I actually have three businesses that I manage. By providing clear responsibilities and authorities to my senior staff, my job is to fix problems and to ensure we are on the correct path to success. A work-life balance is very important to me, especially with my new son that was just born this year. I work hard to ensure that my priorities are in order. I put in the hours needed for ACET when needed (including getting up at 4:30 in the morning for key customer meetings), but also take time for the family to de-stress and enjoy them. I also reinforce this attitude with my staff.

What professional accomplishment are you most proud of?

Growing ACET without compromising our integrity.

What is your favorite hobby? What do you do with your free time?

Other than my three businesses and family, I do like to spend time going to car shows and collecting a few limited models. In fact, my wife recently gave me a fully restored and updated 1955 Chevy Belair.

Do you have a personal mantra?

Yes: "If they can do it, why can't I?"

What advice would you give to someone looking to start a technology company today?

Spend time as an employee learning multiple aspects of the technical side of the business before venturing out on your own. Do not discount partnering as a viable route to obtaining your goals.

EMD Sales Inc.

Baltimore-based EMD Sales Inc. is an international food distributor that delivers more than 3,000 different products to customers such as Acme, Giant, Target and Walmart.

Name: Elda Devarie

Title: President and CEO

Education: Bachelor's degree in accounting and marketing, University of Puerto Rico

Age: 55

What was your first job?

I started my career in my native Puerto Rico. Fresh out of college, I joined Grande Supermarkets in their marketing department. It was my beginning in the food industry: store visits, management and vendor meetings, advertising deadlines. A new world, fast-paced and exciting in an industry that people needed every day in those days.

What is the biggest challenge you have had to overcome in your career?

Realizing that constant change is part of our jobs, careers and lives. We have to understand that being flexible, willing to adapt; reinvent and refocus and to be ahead of the curve is what gives us longevity in our careers and businesses. It is interesting to see the business cycles repeating themselves every so many years. Mergers and acquisitions are changing the faces of customers and the way we do business every day. New technology and business models makes us rethink the way we do business and how to stay viable in an ever-changing market.

What are you most excited about for the future at EMD Sales?

The opportunity to expand our footprint and provide our services to new customers in the northeast is exciting and challenging at the same time. Many retailers are still trying to figure out how to service an ever changing population: diverse, rich in heritage and flavors and how to merge it with traditional mainstream supermarkets. EMD Sales is poised to provide these retailers with the support and experience necessary to reach and service their new neighbors. Many foodies are thirsty to learn and try the many flavors we bring to them.

NewWave Telecom & Technologies

NewWave Telecom & Technologies is an information technology and business services firm based in Elkridge focused on providing digital services, cognitive solutions, data analytics and program management to government agencies and private healthcare companies.

Name: Patrick Munis

Title: President and CEO

Education: Bachelor's degree in mathematics and computer science, Coppin State University; Executive MBA, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Age: 44

What was your first job?

As a teenager, I interned at my uncle's IT company. While there, I was introduced to the earliest word processing and computer applications such as Word Perfect and Lotus 1-2-3, both of which were among the first popular and widely-distributed PC and business applications. I became proficient on these programs and eventually began to train peers within the company. My technical skills continued to expand and I became responsible for building 286 and 386 computer PC models.

Ultimately, I went on to complete my bachelor's of mathematics and computer science, and worked in several firms in a technical capacity before I decided to launch my own application development and IT services company. The drive to embark upon my own entrepreneurial pursuit was largely based upon a desire to solve complex business problems with emerging technical solutions.

What are you most excited about for the future at NewWave Telecom and Technologies?

I am really excited about making a difference in the world and solving problems by leveraging promising new technology such as artificial intelligence. I'm passionate about technology shaping and transforming areas, such as health care delivery, and want to play a significant role in improving the quality of life. I see tremendous opportunity for technology in health care and there are many areas of life where IT solutions can improve experiences for many around the globe.

What advice would you give to someone looking to start a technology company today?

Execution is everything. It is important to define your strengths and be clear about your core capabilities. These capabilities will ultimately shape a firm's brand and become the launching pad for how a company's reputation evolves. Bring people into your organization to balance out the areas that you are not as strong in. Always remain vocal and never be afraid to ask questions. Take criticism in a constructive manner. Be realistic with your vision. Position yourself strategically to minimize the risk of failure. Align yourself with individuals who are focused, while building your own skill set. For me, this included obtaining an Executive MBA from MIT.

Ideas have a shelf life. Do not hold on to your ideas for a long period of time. Refine your ideas and encourage others to be collaborative. The best innovation comes from diversity of opinion.