

Communicating/IT Solutions

Vincenzo Lufino, president of Ecotech Japan, keeps two helmets in his scooter's seat trunk. One is quite practical, and looks very durable, much like the scooter. This is the helmet he uses, except when he has a passenger. The passenger then gets the main helmet and Lufino switches to a kind of racing soup-bowl with a chinstrap. He puts his passengers, like his many customers, first.

His shared office in Hiroo, just a little larger than the scooter, is complete with a desk, several chairs and a huge laptop computer, all but concealing evidence of the thriving enterprise it headquarters. The bare setting offers little by way of conversation, but Lufino opened the mammoth laptop and declared, helpfully, "Now, I will show you how I do business." While the monster machine fired up, he added, "I can do business anywhere so long as I can communicate."

Entrepreneurs everywhere, take note: Lufino's laptop displayed a popular IP telephony application that began to fill with the names of technical specialists based in India—Ecotech's brain trust, power-plant and all-purpose secret weapon. He called the Ecotech specialists one by one, never waiting more than two seconds for the person on the other end to pick up. The conversations always began with a sincere exchange of how-do-

you-dos, followed by discussion after discussion of every kind of IT idea you can and can't think of.



I first learned of Lufino and Ecotech when, despite the challenge he faced as Chair of the ACCJ 2005 Charity Crystal Ball, he proposed to create a Web site dedicated to the Ball, on top of everything else. I misunderstood, and looked forward as manager of ACCJ Communications to making Lufino's vision for the 2005 Ball a reality as a department project, until I asked him later to have a look at what I was doing. "That's very nice," he said sincerely, and then adopted a tone of infinite sympathy. "But you are working so hard!" he said.

After some discussion of ACCJ branding guidelines and how to make them, in Lufino's words, "more romantic" (considering the "Night With The Stars" theme

of our event), he had the full, uncompensated, commission to do the job.

At his office, Lufino showed me a long succession of screens of ongoing and completed projects. "Beautiful, don't you think?" Yes. Including the gorgeous site Ecotech produced for the Ball when Lufino chaired the ACCJ committee. But 70% of Ecotech's business is not Web design. Among the screens, there were interactive portals, shopping sites, elegant animations and 3-D engineering interfaces. "We charge a very low price, and the quality of the work brings in more business. That is one of the important strategies in the IT industry. But only if the customer is satisfied!"

The screens changed to spreadsheets. "See how fast Ecotech is growing!" Ecotech is indeed growing fast, more than doubling every year for the past three years. Lufino pointed to one of the largest numbers at the bottom of the sheet, "This is eight jobs completed in December and January."

"Actually, the customer has to be more than satisfied," Lufino said. "You have to get their recommendation. The way I got started in the IT solutions business was as a marketing consultant. A company of ophthalmologists needed help reaching customers, and I studied so much about ophthalmology

they thought I was one of them. I thoroughly understand their customers and if you need laser surgery on your eye, I can do that, too!" He didn't have a laser handy, so he showed me the Web site Ecotech designed to reach those customers. "They didn't ask me for a Web site," Lufino said. "I decided that's what they needed. I actually had very little experience designing Web sites, but the client needed a way to guide potential customers through their services—a way for the customers to screen themselves and get an initial idea of the strengths of the services. I got deeply into the design, and found Ecotech to realize the solution. To me, it was more fun than work. And with this job, I was able to get more jobs."

That is how Lufino came to lead Ecotech in Japan. Ecotech IT Solutions was founded in India in 2000, in the middle of the boom in hundreds, if not thousands, of similar IT powerhouses. He spent \$15,000 on a three-day course in marketing in the late '90s, where, believably, he was "the only one who had nothing." Except perhaps knowledge. Lufino believes one of his best strengths is marketing strategy. "I already knew a lot of what they were teaching, but to be in the course with other CEOs was very good and helped me to understand how to start a company. And one of the other students recommended Ecotech to me, so I was even more satisfied with the investment."



PHOTOS FOR THE ACCJ JOURNAL: MATTIAS WESTFALK

Lufino, 35, is from Naples, Italy, and speaks with an accent that makes you want to be Italian. He exudes a familial magnanimity.

"Ninety percent of my job is communications. I have to constantly interact with clients, partners and the Ecotech team." One reason for the bare office is that he is almost never there. When not with a client, he habitually has his laptop open at a café in reach of Wi-Fi. "I have an assistant and a researcher, but I'm still looking for a project manager who can learn and communicate like me."

Lufino assumes that the prices he pays for services out of India will go up eventually, and that prices in Japan will go down, so part of his growth strategy is to land the jobs that will build

his reputation now. "Most of your cost is not in launching an IT solution. The biggest cost is maintaining it afterward, especially if you don't plan well," said Lufino. "We reduce the cost by anticipating changes, staying very flexible to the customer's needs, and not charging the customer for every change."

When queried about Ecotech's India-powered price advantage, he offers this explanation: "Price advantage is very important, but competitors can catch up to that, though they will have trouble matching my service."

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