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Facility Services for Vertical Security Markets



Steve Jones - CEO

In 1965, Universal began with one idea in mind – to provide unmatched services and solutions for our clientele. Originally started as a janitorial company serving Southern California, Universal later branched out into security and operated in both the janitorial and security industries until the janitorial division was sold in the late 80s. In 2008, the company launched two new divisions to operate under the Universal umbrella with our protection and fire/life safety companies: Universal Protection Security Systems and Universal Building Maintenance. The systems division runs as an integration and monitoring company, while Universal Building Maintenance is an all-green, environmentally friendly version of the original company. What began as a small, steady start many years ago has now become the largest regional security and janitorial company in the U.S., with more than 35,000 security and janitorial professionals guarding and cleaning billions of dollars in assets located across the nation.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: *Mr. Jones, would you tell us about Universal Services of America and what your focus is today?*

Mr. Jones: Universal Services of America is a facilities services company with revenues in excess of \$1 billion annually. We have a specific core focus in the security vertical markets; more specifically, in manned security guarding and in the electronic security systems field, as well as several adjunct services that are

provided within those spaces. Those would be emergency procedure training and remote video monitoring. Our core focus is primarily manned security guarding and electronic security systems. We also have different service offerings that go along side each of those vertical markets.

CEOCFO: *How large is your business? What states are you in at this point?*

Mr. Jones: Our revenues are in excess of one billion and we are in 47 states, as well as Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands.

CEOCFO: *You sold off your janitorial division a long time ago; are you still in that market?*

Mr. Jones: We still have the janitorial company that we started in 1965. We sold the business off in the late '80s, but then in 2008 we got back into the janitorial business. Today we still have it, but it is a very small piece of our business, providing revenues of about \$50 million, and is not our primary core focus.

CEOCFO: *What sets you apart from others in the manned and video security industry? Why have you been able to grow so much? Do you have local competition as well as other nationals?*

Mr. Jones: First of all, there are very few security companies that provide both like we do. What happens in the security business is that most companies are either doing manned security or they are doing electronic security systems. The combination of both is very rare. Therefore, we are able to do that and successfully bring that solution to the end user, which is our customer. We also have been able to be a strong national provider and at the same time have the local market focus, which is very unique. In our business there are many local market companies and they do a good job in those markets. However, they are not able to service their customer base on a larger scale. Therefore, we are able to bridge that gap and be able to provide the large scale national service levels with that personal touch of a small local company.

CEOCFO: *How do you, as CEO, manage such a large organization and give your customers the understanding that everything is always under control?*

Mr. Jones: We break our organization down into business units as well as into regions. Therefore, we have heads of business units. Then we have regional presidents within those business units, so that they operate like a smaller business

as the CEO. Those individuals report to me. We have a very clear strategic plan that we are focused on executing. Those managers not only focus on those goals and expectations, but at the same time on doing it within their local markets against local competitors and whatever the business environment is in their regions.

CEOCFO: *Is any of your technology proprietary and what about your staff; what sets them apart as individuals? What do you look for when you are hiring someone that is going to provide your service, because, obviously, they are the ones that make the difference in your business?*

Mr. Jones: Within our remote video monitoring business we have some proprietary solutions. They specifically have to do with analyzing video and the analytics that are used in that. Therefore, we have a proprietary solution within that business unit. We have a proprietary, state-of-the-art guard tracking and incident management software system that our security professionals use, which allows our customers complete transparency of our service within their account. Then with regards to the 30,000 security officers that we have across the country and in the US Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, we are one of the top companies for hiring veterans year in and year out. The numbers are staggering of how many veterans that we hire. We are looking for responsible adults that, whether they are in a transition within their career or whether they want to make security their new career, we are looking for someone who takes the job seriously. We are looking for someone who has a very high level of customer service skills. At the end of the day, we are a customer service business, so we are looking for individuals that have that aptitude and the right attitude. We are also looking for people that want to grow in an organization that is growing, depending on the year, of 30-50% each year, with half of that coming organically and half of that coming through acquisitions. Therefore, we are looking for future leaders all the time.

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CEOCFO: *How did you grow your business to such a large organization? Was it through acquisitions? Was it through pounding on doors and making calls? Do you have your own sales force? Where will the future growth develop?*

Mr. Jones: Up until 2008 we had never made an acquisition. We had grown our organization organically at a 30% run rate each year. It was all by knocking on doors and customer referrals when we were a small company, with me and a couple of our managers continuing to provide a very high level of service. Then we started to build a sales force. Today we have a sales force around the country, which is lead by regional VPs of sales that report to those regional presidents. We have in excess of 30 plus sales people around the country that are out and about in the industry, looking for new opportunities. Therefore, we are growing the business organically and continue to grow it organically at a double digit pace. Since 2008 we have made about 25 acquisitions. If you look at our overall revenue right now, which is in excess of a billion, about half of that has been through organic growth, and half of it comes through acquisitions.

CEOCFO: *Is there a particular size company that you target for acquisition?*

Mr. Jones: No, we target several different vertical markets. One is healthcare. One is commercial office buildings. Others are residential communities, retail, industrial manufacturing and corporate facilities.

CEOCFO: *What is the branding name for your services? Are you a recognized name?*

Mr. Jones: Universal Services of America is a parent company. The recognized brand name in the market is Universal Protection Service. This is our manned guarding company, which is the national company and built on service delivery. That is becoming more and more of a household brand name as we continue to grow and expand.

CEOCFO: *You are still looking at acquisitions and growing your business which is great. How are you funded for this? Do you see yourself reaching out for funding or are you really set to go as you move forward?*

Mr. Jones: We are in a strong position from a capital standpoint. We also have outstanding relationships with several different financial institutions. Therefore, we have the capability to continue to grow our business organically and through acquisitions over the next five plus years as we look out to the horizon. Our goal is to double the size of the business and make it a \$2 billion a year revenue company.

CEOCFO: *What should people remember most about the Universal Services of America story?*

Mr. Jones: We are a business that, throughout the economic downturn that occurred over the last four or five years, has continued to grow and expand at a double digit rate. The challenges of our business come in managing a large diverse group of employees. Every day there are challenges, especially when they are spread out across 47 states. In addition, we feel that the security industry is going to continue to grow and expand. Security is a business that, as the world evolves, continues to play an important part in our businesses, communities and our environment.

CEOCFO: *Are there any awards or recognition which are notable for the company?*

Mr. Jones: In 2009 we won the Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award and we are consistently recognized as one of the best places to work. We are also on one of the Inc. lists four or five years running. The last two years we have been the number one top job creators a. We created more jobs than other company on the Inc. list for two years in a row.

BIO: As CEO of Universal Services of America, Steve Jones presides over all company operations and began his career with the company in 1996, bringing with him over a dozen years of proven management experience within the service industry. Mr. Jones was one of the youngest managers ever to hold an executive level position within BFI, a fortune 200 company. Prior to that, he was the youngest Regional Sales and Marketing Manager in the country for one of the largest uniform service companies in the U.S. While at Universal Protection Service, Mr. Jones has educated himself in all aspects of the security industry and was heavily involved in emergency preparedness training after the events of September 11. Mr. Jones' emphasis throughout his career has focused on building and maintaining long term client-customer relationships. As a graduate of California Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo, Mr. Jones holds a BA in Political Science and an MBA from University of Redlands. Steve is an active member in YPO, ASIS, BOMA, ISMA, IFMA and IREM.



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