

MSP SUCCESS

MAGAZINE

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Special Edition: Fall 2020

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Ryan Haislar, CEO Of Computerease

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MSP Business Feature:

Computerease



Company:
Computerease

Founded:
1984

Headquartered:
St. Louis, Missouri

Geographic Market:
St. Louis metro area and the entirety of Illinois

Top Growth Indicator:
Top line revenue, monthly recurring revenue, and number of managed clients

YoY % of Growth:
23% average growth over the past 5 years; over 48% in growth in the past year

President & CEO:
Ryan Haislar



Since 1984

Becoming An IT Hero

How A Devastating Business Betrayal Inspired Ryan Haislar To Become An IT Hero For 'Built-From-Scratch' Business Owners

Ryan Haislar will never forget the most devastating day of his dad's professional life.

It was 1987 and his dad, Dennis (Ike) Haislar, was 3 years into running a new business he started with two business partners selling Commodore 64 computers.

One partner was a silent investor. The other had no money to invest but knew how to sell. Together, they made a great team and the business, Computerease, took off.

But unbeknownst to Ike, his partner was embezzling money – and by the time Ike discovered what was going on, he had already lost thousands. When he returned home from work that day, he sat the family down to tell them the news.

"I'll never forget the look on his face," Ryan said. "I instinctively knew something terrible had happened."

Clasping his hands over his neck, his head hanging down, Ike tried to hide his embarrassment and anger as he revealed that his business partner was selling equipment to clients on the side, using the company credit line to buy the merchandise but getting the clients to make the checks out to him personally. The partner Ike explicitly trusted had stolen \$150,000 (equivalent to approximately \$350,000 today).

Although Ike got rid of the partner and sued, he never recovered the money. However, Ike had tenacity and grit and worked hard, paid off all the debt, and bought out his silent partner investor.

An Important Mission Is Established

Witnessing the stress and struggle his dad experienced made a powerful impression on Ryan and is one of the reasons he's dedicated

his business to helping protect the "from scratch" hard-working business owners like his father.

"My dad got left holding the bag, even though his only fault was trusting people too much," Ryan said. "It made it worse that it was his partner, however any time you have money stolen from you, it's devastating, no matter the circumstances. Entrepreneurs work hard to make money. You put your life into making your business grow and make a profit... and that's why we work so hard to protect our clients with cybersecurity. The new criminals today are the ransomware guys. These third world bandits come in, steal your money, and you'll never get it back."

After all, Ryan knows, firsthand, how difficult it is to start and grow a business. He grew up hanging out at the business his dad started which was located just five blocks from his house.

Early on, he showed an entrepreneurial initiative. "I never had anything handed to me," Ryan said. "Before I could drive, I'd ride my bike to the office and clean it, take out the trash, *anything* to earn some money to buy what I wanted."

When he was sixteen, to earn money to fix up a clunky old car and put gas in it, he delivered computers to clients and built thousands of computers with his own hands for school contracts his dad secured.

"We built the first computer lab at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE)," Ryan said. "We were the IT department at SIUE before anyone even had anything called an IT department. It was called the MIS department and we would fix all the computers and printers."

Ryan recalled his dad hosting a popular radio talk show called "Computer Talk" every Saturday morning for ten years. "It was the first of its kind," Ryan said. "Dad had guests such as HP and AT & T executives on to discuss all things computer and how to use technology in business day-to-day operations."

As the computer industry progressed, Ryan learned networking, beginning with the earliest renditions ARC Net and Novell, so he could deliver what his dad promised clients. "In our industry, we are considered ancient as most other IT companies have only been doing this for about 15 years," Ryan said. "I got into networking and supported clients in its infancy. One of my clients, that spans 20 years, I did all the technical work building a new \$130,000 network for them in 1999 when they needed to move to a different system because of Y2K."

Attending college at SIUE, Ryan discovered he had a passion and a head for business. "My dad never went to business school," Ryan said. "But for me, when it comes to business, I'm like a sponge. I am constantly trying to figure out how I can do better and find the best ways to operate, manage, and grow."

The Conversation That Changed The Trajectory Of Computerease

After college, Ryan's responsibilities increased. Working harder than ever, Ryan and his dad set a new goal. "I remember my dad saying, 'If we could just make a \$1,000 a day, that would be amazing.'"

But by 2005, things weren't better. In fact, they were barely trading water.

"I couldn't go anywhere without my cell phone ringing constantly," Ryan said. "My blood pressure was off the chart. I was irritable and stressed out to the max because I was doing

all this work. I remember going to a business conference and half the time I had to work. It was at that moment I thought, 'We're not being successful, and I want to be successful.' It wasn't for my father's lack of trying; he just didn't know how. While the business was never in danger of failing, I could see our potential and what the business could be, and what we were doing just wasn't sustainable."

What followed changed the trajectory of the company forever. "I went to my dad and put my arm out straight across the air and said, 'Dad, this is our growth curve,'" Ryan said. "We've got to do something different. I need to talk to someone outside of you and me." Reluctantly, Ike agreed. Ryan began attending industry events, learned how to improve their marketing and sales, and started introducing new strategies to their business. He applied for and was accepted into the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses program, an intense business bootcamp which helped him build a customized business growth plan.

Transforming the company, Ryan took over day-to-day operations of Computerease in 2012, was named Vice President in 2014 and President & CEO in 2020. Growing the company to the seven-figure successful company it is today, Ryan doubled his team and expanded the full-service IT support and VoIP phone services company to serve all of Illinois in addition to St. Louis. Plus, since Ryan took over, the company has averaged 23% growth year over year, clocking an impressive 48% increase last year, the company's best year ever.

Ike retired from the company in spring 2019. He died six months later, but not before he got to see Computerease break records. "It made my dad so happy," Ryan said. "This company was his baby and knowing he got to hear this news before he passed away is really special."

Why Clients Have Stayed Loyal For Decades

Many clients who've been with Computerease for 20 years or more credit their loyalty to the level of support Ryan continues to give. "We get involved with our clients," Ryan said. "If there is something we don't do, we NEVER make them go it alone. We either guide them, connect them with a vetted vendor we trust, or help them figure it out."

Ryan's rare trifecta of longevity in the computer industry, deep understanding of the technical side, and an uncanny knack for business have attracted forward-thinking, growth-minded companies who appreciate feedback along with effective, reliable, secure business solutions from a technology perspective. But what keeps them is Ryan's dedication to finding solutions, which he attributes to his dad.

"My dad struggled in the business because he just didn't know exactly what he should do," Ryan said. "A lot of times people don't understand how the technology actually works and fits into their business to help them accomplish what they want to do. I provide technology solutions that solve my client's business challenge. We put a lot of time and effort into solutions to do things the right way so our clients can scale and grow." ■