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**DAVID PARK, ZDA**

**Slovenski partner James Barkas
Poslovni načrt za resne podjetnike
Prednosti CAD**

# DAVID PARK

by Jože Vilfan

A twenty-one year old entrepreneur, whom we met at Babson College is an exceptional example of what happens when a person combines a talent with knowledge, while at the same time his environment enables him to make the most of it. David Park is in essence an educated businessman - what he heard in school he deliberately translated into his vision.

David Park is the son of a Korean, who as one of the best high school students in Korea received a national scholarship to study in high schools in the USA. After returning home, his father once more came to the United States to study at Columbia University. There he met David's mother, who is of Jewish descent. David insists that he learned alot from both. His father an eye specialist who from early on resolved to utilize the best equipment and techniques in order to better service his patients. From him David inherited his interest for technology. His mother on the other hand, has managerial capabilities (David insists that it is she who is the "boss" of the practice) and has studied languages - a gift, that David also possesses. While already at the age of 15 he was engaged in conducting his enterprises ... among his present goals are to learn a few more of the world's languages.

*David, when did you actually begin to work with computers?*

At the age of seven after my father bought an Apple II computer for his business. That was 1977. Immediately I fell in love with the computer and began to have fun with it.

*Did your father teach you how to use the computer?*

No, with regards to the computer my father only had a feeling for the direction that the technology was taking and was not as good with the application. The operation of the computer I taught myself. I read magazines and books about computers and I discussed it with other people who used them also. The turning point came with a telephone call. I was about eight or nine years old when I called an expert

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in California. We talked and from that moment on I called him often. This way I found out what was happening in the then infant computer industry. At that time there was no computer market as we know it now nor were there any stores. Calling other people who also worked with computers was the only way that I could find out what was really happening in the field.

I also learned a few computer programs, however programming did not excite me as much as other activities. I preferred to demonstrate to people all that is possible to do with a computer.

*When did you decide to convert your knowledge into a business for profit?*

I was about fourteen or fifteen years old when I realized that from my connections with the people who were at the top of the computer development that I had accumulated enough knowledge to interest a larger circle of consumers. At that time I more or less read by coincidence in the newspaper that in Buffalo, NY where I lived, a computer fair was to take place. I decided that I would participate as an exhibitor. For an exhibition booth of 3m x 3m I asked my parents to lend me 650 dollars, explaining to them that with the money I had earned by mowing the grass at home (10 dollars for one mowing) that I would be able to rent the space. To this my father replied: "I will agree son, but only if you prepare a good business plan." So I sat down and started to write. I intended to sell computer programs and disks, while at the same time teach people how to use a computer.

On the first day of the show a lady stopped by and asked me what I was doing at the show; perhaps I was tending the booth while my father was absent? I explained my business to her. I told her that I had blank disks for sale on the average about 40% cheaper than available in retail stores or by other exhibitors and I also showed her all of the software that I had for sale. It turned out that the lady was a journalist. The following day a big article appeared in the newspaper calling me the fifteen year old star of the show. The day after the article the shoppers virtually besieged my booth. At that fair I sold $ 6000.00 worth of software. At that time that was more than an average sale of a store in a three month period.

*How do you explain your success? Did it happen on account of your youthful appearance and enthusiasm or was there anything else?*

At the time that I started everything was just beginning. Software programs were not that good and the computer also were not yet so affordable as they are today. Perhaps I succeeded because I went to so much trouble explaining to people what is generally possible to do with computers. I took a great deal of pleasure in that. The other people selling computers were only interested in money. It was important for them to sell a computer worth $2000 dollars for $3000 dollars. If the customer wanted to find out anything about the computer they charged them $50 an hour, and all the while long in reality they did not even understand the computers they were selling. However, I was young and everything excited me. Besides that I did understand the computers. I always suggested to my customers to visit the other stores and compare the prices. When they came back I was always willing to explain everything over again. The reception that they received at the other stores made all the difference, that is why I succeeded.

At the exhibition there was another local store from Buffalo called Modern Tek which was supervised by David Doran. We befriended each other because both of us were disenchanted by the way that people were selling computers. We figured out that in reality people weren't really using their computers. They bought them and

after a year or so they would end up in the attic or their children would get them to play games. That is why he thought of selling used computers and he needed somebody to help him with this project. Along with his partner we soon opened a business called Amherst Computer Exchange (Amherst is the area in NY state where I used to live). At first we only had used computers and software

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programs which we always sold at a large discount (this was an unusual practice in retailing software). Our motto was that the customer was always right. So when a customer protested that something was wrong we immediately refunded the money or exchanged the equipment, as there really is no point to argue over a few dollars.

We opened the store in 1985. At that point I also closed my other enterprise. During the high point of the first venture's growth period I employed about 25 workers. I closed it because it did not make sense to employ the same people in both businesses.

*Who were the employees who worked for you?*

They were local high school students. I paid them from 10 to 15% of their sales. The supplies were stored right in their homes and because I did not yet have a drivers license my mother drove me from one employee to the other. My employees, the students were selling the computers and products to their parents and to other fellow students. This was a market that nobody had thought about yet but the business was quite serious.

*How did you combine the managing of a business with school.*

Before I opened the business I studied at a private school that required about a 45 minute car ride. Classes lasted till late afternoon, after

which I still had to go to hockey practice. I usually returned home at six or six thirty in the evening. The time factor was one of the reasons that I decided to register at the public school close to my home and of course close to my business. My mother would drop me off at the business in the morning so that I could arrange the finances and then go to school. After I turned sixteen everything became easier to accomplish because I got my drivers license.

However in all of these undertakings there was also some luck involved. Buffalo was becoming a leading center of the computer hardware and software distribution business. Jordan Levy, a founder of Software Distribution Services (which later became Ingram then merged with MicroD and became IngramMicro) is also from Buffalo. One of the partners in Amherst Computer Exchange, David Doran, once went to school with Jordan. Through David I met Jordan, whom I consider to be the first computer industry "personality" that I knew. Together we attended major exhibition fairs such as COMDEX in Atlanta, and shows in San Francisco, and Chicago. At the age of 16 I got the chance to meet such people as Steven Jobs and Steve Wozniak, people whom I consider at the top of the industry. By travelling to shows I received important information first-hand which put us ahead of our competition. For instance, I would sit at the dinner table as everybody generously discussed business, all without noticing me, the sixteen year old. In this manner I found out the most unusual secrets: what businesses they were attempting to buy, how the stocks were moving, what was new in technology... I sat quietly, straining my ears and smiling. At the end they discovered of course, that I had vigilantly followed their discussions. This went on for several years allowing me to accumulate a huge amount of knowledge about the working of the computer industry.

As time passed the selling of computers; the programs and equipment became less interesting to me. I was warming up for the opportunities that lay ahead. My technical expertise was blossoming. Day in and day out my mailbox was filled with different technical literature and since my computer is constantly

connected to various information networks, I never ceased to stay in contact with various sources of information. It was as if I was becoming a living database. College helped me with this transitional phase. Here I tried to exclude myself from the retail computer business. For example, I took time to travel around the world and also became fluent in Spanish.

However, while I tried to diversify myself I always worked. During my studies at Babson I worked as a waiter, but even here I could not escape computers. All the time in the restaurant my co-workers asked me about computers and when I came home there were always many requests for advice waiting on the answering machine or computer (where somebody should buy something or how to solve this or another problem). It soon became clear to me that after 10 or more hours in the restaurant I made 50 dollars and when I came home I made 50 dollars in an hour for advice on technology.

*What happened with your business?*

When I left the business remained with the partners, who actually invested the money. I only worked for them and was paid on that basis. I therefore don't include my participation in that business as my first enterprise because I did not contribute as a real partner, investing money at risk. The break-up happened when I went to college.

This last fall semester an Argentinean friend of mine came to see me regarding a matter. My activities with the computers and technology are known at Babson because I often help other students who are not as familiar with the computers. His father was coming for a visit to Boston and he asked me to meet him to have a discussion about computers and technology. His father wanted to meet me in order to find out whether or not I could help him with his company. He invited me to lunch and we discussed some of the technology difficulties facing his company. Over lunch I showed him several options for his company to pursue. My summer that I spent in California's Silicon Valley meeting with various technology people helped me greatly in working to solve his problems. From that moment on things began to go on their own: His father told me: "David, I need you in Argentina."

So I travelled for two weeks to Argentina. The first 10 days I worked for their company and the last 4 days I spent with another company where I was invited to look at by chance because on the night prior to my departure from Boston I met the daughter of a friend of the owner of the second company who thought that I caould help.

The experience at Amherst Computer Exchange through my college experience combined with my constant activity in the computer industry has now resulted in what I am doing now, technology consulting. I consider the Global Technology Group my first true enterprise, no safety nets. I started out just selling blank computer disks, then developed the computer retail business, and now am beginning a full-fledged consulting firm. We are growing step-by-

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step while always being confronted by the harsh realities of the business world.

*What are you actually doing now?*

My activies now are a prime example of an entrepreneurial activity, acquiring a market niche. The nineties will be a period of world communication as the world is "shrinking." The developing countries will, like all others, have to fight for a share of the world market, local markets are too small. For instance, through the two Argentinean companies, I realized that a company that wants to succeed in the global market often cannot depend on an informational infrastructure that the state or government offers. In my opinion, all countries are in a developing stage, and they are developing informational infrastructures too slowly. Realistically for less developed countries, it can be expected that progress in development will happen in the next 20 years. If there is no communication there will be no jobs. That is why the biggest companies there, those who have capital, have begun to invest in communication systems. There is my opportunity. The knowledge that I have accumulated since the beginning of the computer generation lets me do such things as develop a satellite communications system for a company in Argentina. This is a typical solution where I unite technology from Japan and the United States from different spheres, namely telephone, computer, and satellite. My consulting firm works on the integration of all of these systems.

*How is your company doing, are you still personally working there?*

I have an active role as the President of the Global Technology Group. I select and purchase the technology to be used in solutions including the programs which are custom engineered for our clients. However, I do not write the programs anymore - it is better, much more efficient and effective to have a team of software engineers design software for our clients.

*"The project in Argentina is to design a satellite communication system."*

*For what kind of enterprise are you developing a communications system?*

Our first client is an agro-industrial company.

*What are your feelings about your success?*

My success is challenging for me because it will enable me to further my technological and personal growth. I am happy that as a young person, I am only 21, to have the opportunity to help my clients companies improve and become better companies. In a way I have indirectly created new working environments for the Argentineans, by that the renewed quality of their products improve their performance. I don't care too much for the money aspect of business. To me the real enjoyment comes from observing people who suddenly discover, that they can do much more.

*What kind of plans do you have for the future, David?*

My company I have named **Global Technology Group** because I have tried to develop a global or universal vision. I believe that communication will unite the whole world and become the most important tool. More and more people will come into contact with one another and become partners in this world and this contact will be as simple as contacting your neighbor once was. This change will tremendously influence the way that we manage, and the result will be such that the companies will be able to do more with the environment in which they live. The contact will change us into a different mode of thinking, culture, and knowledge which will add a special quality to life. According to my opinion the linking of world communication has significant meaning for the further development of lesser world powers, as examples of Latin America or Eastern Europe are beginning to show us. Of course for making investments you need capital, however not too much. I can pull a developing country from the stone age into the space age. I actually only need to give them the infrastructure, everything else, the people have to do on their own. The new knowledge they have to find by themselves. Of course I cannot pretend that by the introduction to satellite technology all of the problems of some tribal group in Africa will be solved, however communications technology will speed up the decisions, and the decisions will be made easier and faster. If there was no communications technology, one would actually have to ask yourself, will you be able to realize the things that you have in your mind.

*Would you come to Yugoslavia to work out such a communications system*

Yes, I would go anywhere in the world. If there was a chance on the moon, I would even go there... but only if I am able to return though, because it is pretty nice here at home. If I have enough spare time I would also come to Yugoslavia. Because of the desire infused in me by Babson College and Professor Godfredtsen to connect with Yugoslavia, I would like to come and see you too because as I can see your enterprise is growing.