Tech Firm Specializes in the 'Internet of Things'

Started in 2001, Altaworx is an internet communications protocol provider located in Fairhope. Pictured from left to right, are: Jaime Rawden, Lydia Walker, Danielle Kennedy, Matthew Conklin, Rickie Richey, Forrest Derr, Hillary Johnson, Susan Uston, Edwin Miller, Michael Sheldt and Ward Murphy.

As broad as the internet and the world of computer software are, Fairhope-based Altaworx has found a niche in IoT, the "Internet of Things."

"IoT is the world of devices, whether mobile or fixed, that connect to the internet to accomplish a task," explained **Forrest Derr**, director of information technology at Altaworx. "That could be as simple as ordering more drinks for a fountain machine or as complex as keeping a server updated on the health statistics of a horse in a pasture through sensors in its harness. Basically, it is anything that requires an internet connection to autonomously perform a task."

Established on the Eastern Shore in 2001, Altaworx is an internet communications protocol provider that has grown from two employees to a dozen full-time workers in the past 15 years. The company, which moved into a 2,250-square-foot office space on U.S. Hwy. 98 in Fairhope in March, is the Mobile Area Chamber's Small Business of the Month.

Altaworx develops custom machine-to-machine apps, based on a customer's needs, and then bundles the software with other associated hardware and bandwidth. With data centers in Atlanta and Dallas to host the company's servers and equipment, the company currently works with more than 300 clients, ranging from small businesses to municipalities and universities, with a focus on IoT.

"We're the communication bridge for IoT by providing the mobile data connectivity for those devices," Derr said. "And because we can pool our client base of data together, we can get better rates for our clients on internet and private network connectivity."

Altaworx was recently recognized nationally as a "Solution Provider Champion" by AT&T and is the first company in the U.S. to become an AT&T Partner Exchange reseller of AT&T machine-to-machine connectivity for IoT applications. Altaworx CEO **Rickie Richey** said it is a very exciting time for the company.

"It has the potential to expand our business rapidly," Richey said. "The wireline segment of our business (land line internet connections including DSL, T1, fiber connections, etc.) has grown over 2,000 percent since 2013. And now with IoT, we could see an even greater growth rate."

Altaworx is working with Fortune 100/500 companies to discuss their IoT connectivity, and Richey said the company is also working with other customers that could expand its business into Canada, Europe and the Middle East.

"Some of the accounts that we are working with could very quickly dwarf our entire VoIP (voice over internet protocol) business on a monthly basis if they grow as expected," Derr said. "While our VoIP continues to grow at exciting rates, IoT connectivity has exponential growth opportunities that will transform our business model."

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