

# Terminal Success

*ExaDigm's adaptability redefines industry innovation*

By Bryan Ochalla

Planning for growth is a challenge for any company, yet it's especially troublesome for payments system providers because every customer embraces technology differently. Some want the latest and greatest, while others are more comfortable using what they already know.

The industry "suffers from inertia," says Mike Mulcahy, CEO of ExaDigm in Santa Ana, California. "A lot of people are used to the status quo."

Mulcahy gleaned that observation from his more than 15 years in the industry, working with Panasonic (in the company's POS system division), California Retail Data Systems, MIST Inc., GEAC, and Mellon Bank (in its merchant services division). And for the last four years, he's helped ExaDigm work its way into an industry he says "is used to seeing the same thing over and over again."

## Critical Components

ExaDigm opened its doors in 2000. "We knew we had to come up with a compelling reason to get people to pay attention to us and our products, and not turn their attention to the competition instead," says Mulcahy.

One way the employees of ExaDigm have differentiated the company is by offering terminals that run on the open-source PC operating system, Linux. They decided to use it "not because it was free—though that certainly was a motivator—but because it allowed us to leverage a lot of brain trust." Because so many organizations run on Linux, ExaDigm can learn from the experiences of others.

The second critical decision the company made involved the hardware used to run its Linux-supported software. "Our terminal basically is a laptop," Mulcahy explains. "It has a lot of the attributes and consistencies you'll find in a PC."

Going hand in hand with that PC-like architecture is its modularity. For example, Mulcahy says, "a customer can clip whatever modem they want onto the back of the terminal—and then they can pop it off and pop another on if they want to switch for whatever reason"—for instance, if a customer moves locations and is getting Internet service from a different provider.

Combined, these three attributes of ExaDigm's terminal—Linux-backed, PC-based, and completely modular—helped the company create a solid product that Mulcahy believes will be able to adapt to whatever the industry throws at it.

"Some people call us a wireless company," he says. "We won't argue that, but that's not all we're about. We're also an IP terminal company, though the best way to describe us, I think, is to say we're a software company."



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—Mike Mulcahy,  
CEO, ExaDigm

## Proving Ground

Recently, ExaDigm's terminal adaptability was put to the test when a customer in India asked ExaDigm staffers if they could craft a Wi-Fi-based terminal.

"We had been showing them CDMA- and GSM-based terminals," Mulcahy recalls, "but they said, 'We'd rather use Wi-Fi. Can you do that for us?'"

ExaDigm did—in just six weeks—mostly because employees did not have to build an entirely new terminal from scratch, Mulcahy explains. "All we had to do was build the modem. We just had to find the right Wi-Fi board and integrate it into our modem case."

The ExaDigm crew aided another customer after they discovered the client had been carrying around three different modems—CDMA, GSM, and Wi-Fi—to use with its terminal. "We built a modem for that customer that included Wi-Fi and CDMA capabilities," Mulcahy says. "It was all in the same box—they could switch back and forth without switching out modems."

All of these solutions are possible because the system is flexible and offers users more options for connectivity, which will be particularly important as the industry embraces new communications devices.

"That's why we made the decisions we did when we started—long before we ever had to worry about Wi-Fi or anything else," he adds. "We developed our terminal the way we did because we couldn't predict the future."

## Choice Matters

On paper, it may seem as though ExaDigm's terminal is drastically different than its competitors', but Mulcahy assures all of the bells and whistles he's trumpeted are only obvious to the "technology guys."

"Most people buy our product because it's easier to work with, it's more intuitive, or our coverage is better," Mulcahy adds. They also buy it because they want their customers to have choices.

"We're not tied to a particular piece of hardware. We'll always offer it, but we can also integrate our software into someone else's hardware." In other words, "we don't have to know what the future holds," Mulcahy says. "Whatever direction this industry moves in, we'll be moving along with it. **TT**

*Bryan Ochalla is a contributing writer to Transaction Trends. Reach him at bochalla@yahoo.com.*