

Thirty years in business is a long time for any Southern Nevada company. For a firm in the high-tech field, it's an eternity.

Of course, none of this was on Deric Hill's mind when he loaded up the green Ford Pinto wagon in New Mexico and headed for Las Vegas in the summer of 1977. At the time, all he cared about was keeping the car (which had no air conditioning) and the dog from overheating during the long trek across the Mojave.

Hill, an employee of Holman's, Inc., of Albuquerque, was charged with the task of opening a Las Vegas branch. Holman's, which sold manual drafting supplies, Hewlett-Packard hand-held calculators, and an assortment of surveying equipment, was already doing business with a number of architectural, engineering and construction companies in Nevada, so establishing a local presence made sense. Within a few short weeks (??), Holman's of Nevada opened its doors in a converted house at 3515 W. Charleston.

Fast forward three decades. Today, Holman's is a true Las Vegas success story, occupying a 12,500 square foot technical services facility at 4445 S. Valley View Blvd. Over the years, the company has evolved and morphed many times to keep pace with the demands of the marketplace. With more than 40 employees and 6 divisions encompassing custom computer hardware and supplies, CAD services and training, network support, business technology solutions and more, Holman's of Nevada has become a trusted community resource for all things technical.

"There's a reason we've been able to survive and thrive for 30 years," said Hill, who became company president when he and his partners, Stuart Martin and Dave Meteyer, purchased the firm in 1989. "In a word: Change. It's been the one constant. We're not the same company we were 5 years, 2 years, even 6 months ago. The only way is to respond to the market. If you don't change, you cease to exist."

The first major change came in the early 80s, when Holman's led the shift from manual to computer aided drafting. "That was really our first entry into the computer market," said Hill.

After that, the technological innovations continued at an ever-increasing rate. In 1985, Holman's sold the first true PC in the Las Vegas market, the Hewlett-Packard 110. Dubbed "The Portable," the computer came with 16 k of memory (upgradeable to 32), a 40 mb storage cassette, and a built-in printer. "The 'Luggable' would have been a more appropriate name," joked vice president Dave Meteyer. "It was the size of a large suitcase. But it was state-of-the-art for its day."

The purchaser certainly thought so. A local anesthesiologist, he used the PC as a tool to analyze blood gases. And so the local personal computer revolution was off and running.

On the surveying side, Holman's introduced the Leitz self-contained total station in 1987. For the first time, surveyors could import data directly into a computer, a concept known as "field to finish."

By the late 1980s, it had become clear to the Holman's management team that their vision for the future was more aggressive than that of their parent company. By purchasing the Nevada operation, they ensured that it would keep ahead of the curve in the local market.

Since that time, the milestones have mounted. Holman's involvement with PCs foreshadowed opportunities in networking. Soon, the company had a full-time certified Novelle Netware Engineer on staff. In drafting, AutoCAD became the industry standard, and Holman's was quick to catch the wave. In 1994, with the old house (and an annex) bursting at the seams, the company moved to its current location. "We thought of it as a technical services mini-mall," said Hill. "It was great to finally be able to offer everything our clients needed under one roof."

Shrinking hardware margins and the arrival of the Internet created new challenges. Holman's responded by building and branding their own PCs. "We could do it faster and better than the big guys, while making a realistic profit," said Hill. "And because we're local, every Holman's PC was customized for each individual client."

Even so, the service aspect of the industry began to take center stage. "Lead with services, follow with products" became the company's new mantra, according to vice president Stuart Martin. "We were a de facto value-added retailer before anyone here even knew the term."

With that in mind, Holman's created TotalCare, a brand name given to blocks of time purchased by clients for any professional integrated services, including planning, installation, configuration, training and ongoing support. Clients were quick to discover that TotalCare saved thousands of dollars compared to funding the overhead of an in-house IT department.

At the dawn of the new millennium, as clients and prospects became more tech savvy, they began requesting specific products and services. In response, Holman's created an internal "skunk works," a testing lab to determine product capability, service requirements, and overall "company fit." Products passing the Holman's test included LaserFiche electronic document management software (ushering in the era of the "paperless office"), Buzzsaw (an online project collaboration service), and a host of highly specific AutoCAD products and upgrades.

Which brings us to today and the question, "What will the future look like?"

Stuart Martin summed it up best: "Holman's has always been about introducing business technology to our community. As soon as it becomes widespread, we seek out the next big thing. That will continue to be the true heart of this company; a deep and lasting relationship with our clients, our vendors, with Southern Nevada as a whole. We have been and always will be a resource people can count on."

Stay tuned. The next thirty years should be bright, indeed.