

ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR 2007

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STORIES OF SUCCESS

Celebrating the
Spirit of Leadership
in the **Prairies**



In the mid '90s, Mark Ryski was working part-time in a computer software retail store to help pay for university. As the marketing manager, he would run advertising campaigns, but he couldn't measure a critical success metric. He realized that if retailers understood this metric, they could recognize not only how much they sell, but what percentage of shoppers they actually sell to—a concept called "conversion."

Ryski developed a device that could monitor retail traffic. The retailers, however, didn't bite. "I couldn't convince retailers to part with \$2,500 for traffic counters, even though they were spending millions on advertising," he says. "My small venture turned out to be a failure."

Over the next 14 years, Ryski worked for other employers and made a successful career for himself as a vice president at Intuit—although in the back of his mind, his original idea gnawed at him. It was a potentially powerful, successful metric. How could he sell it to retailers?

In 2005, Ryski wrote and self-published a book about customer conversion analysis titled *When Retail Customers Count* and began giving away copies to prospective clients. Retailers started to nibble, and the top brass started returning his previously ignored phone calls. "Retailers need to

What has been the highlight of your entrepreneurial career and why?

Getting my book published was a significant highlight because people started really listening. Prior to having the book, I felt like I was standing on top of a mountain, screaming and no one was hearing me. Then, with the book, they started to get it. Essentially, it validated what I was trying to tell the large retail corporations and that's when the business started to take off.



Mark Ryski
President and CEO

HeadCount Corporation
EDMONTON, ALBERTA

be educated, so I started sending out the book to CEOs of retail chains," says Ryski. "All of a sudden, I had access to senior-level executives, and now, all large companies are starting to open their eyes to the value of conversion."

These days, HeadCount offers a complete traffic analysis including the equipment, analysis, and reporting. As a result, Ryski has introduced a new way of thinking and a valuable new asset

to retail corporations that have earned him clients such as Hallmark, lululemon athletica and London Drugs.

Starting HeadCount has also proven to be rewarding in some unexpected ways, says Ryski. "Since I became an entrepreneur, I've had more balance in my life—I have more control over my time and am not at the mercy of other people's schedules," he explains.

—Christine Gillies

"I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO RECONNECT WITH MY FAMILY, INCLUDING MY 10-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER AND MY SIX-YEAR-OLD SON."

