

NEW VENTURES

PHOTO/COURTESY INTEGRATED FOREST MANAGEMENT



Mark Rabon (far right) with three of his Integrated Forest Management co-owners

Branching out

A conversation with Mark Rabon, president and co-owner of **Integrated Forest Management** in Turner

Founded: January 2008

Number of employees: 6

Startup costs: \$70,000

Revenue, year one: \$592,600

Projected revenue, year two: \$664,000

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What does Integrated Forest Management do?

Integrated Forest Management is a full-service forestry and natural resource management firm specializing in forest-based ecosystems and markets. We provide forest management services to small private landowners, large industrial landowners, land trusts and high-net-worth individuals. We provide all forms of forest management services, from land acquisition services to land management of properties, to managing assets and harvesting and delivering products to market and generating revenue for land owners. We are certified by the Forest Stewardship Council, an organization that certifies forest management practices.

How did the idea to start this business come about?

The other three co-owners and I were colleagues at another company in Maine that had some significant changes take place at the shareholder level. So I proposed to the board of directors that we change the operating model of the company and that I take the employees and create a new company, which became Integrated Forest Management.

Why did you pick Turner as your location?

Besides the fact that Turner was closer to many of our homes, this part of the state is an area that we felt had real possibility for expansion. The majority of our work is in the southern half of the state but we have some land acquisition projects in the works in the central northern region of the state. We're also working with the U.S. Forest Service in New Hampshire. We didn't want to limit ourselves geographically with our name because we expect to provide services outside of Maine and New England, but at the moment we're focusing fairly close to home.

How did you finance this business?

Being a service-oriented business, there wasn't a whole lot of overhead. We do have some company vehicles and equipment and we took a note out from our previous employer. We also opened up a line of credit with Androscoggin Bank, but we

haven't had to use much; we've been fortunate that way. The owners also put in some personal funds for various expenses at the start.

How do you market your business?

We've got the website and we participate in a lot of events and attend land trust meetings where we can set up a booth and meet with individuals. We're members of the Society of American Foresters and they have annual and quarterly meetings where we meet with potential clients.

How have you grown your business?

The land acquisition factor was not one of our primary goals at the start, but given the current economic climate, there is a lot of potential there so we put a lot of energy into that part of the business.

What's your competition like?

There are a lot of consulting foresters and foresting firms out there. Some are certified but most are not and we believe that's an important part of the process. We think it sets us aside from the mainstream a bit.

What's the biggest challenge you've faced running this business?

The biggest challenge really is the cash flow process. The costs of running a business are incredible and keeping the cash flowing is a huge issue, especially given the circumstances of the economy. Breaking into the marketplace as a new entity is a huge challenge; fortunately IFM recognition was quick because many people in the industry knew us as a collective, but still breaking into an established industry and building a new business through time is a challenge.

What are your goals for the future of your business in the next 5-10 years?

Our goals will be to expand our geography and move beyond the borders of Maine. We would like to grow a land base of our own and have IFM landholdings. We'd like to continue to grow the relationships we're fostering now, such as the Androscoggin Land Trust.

Interview by Mercedes Grandin

New Ventures profiles young businesses, 6-18 months old. Send your suggestions and contact information to editorial@mainebiz.biz.

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