

like ambulances and police road blocks.”

Only a couple of years removed from college, and Bator is able to say something that many entrepreneurs can't after operating a business for a year: “It's definitely something that's profitable. There's no debt, and the traffic is growing.”

### Jackson National Targets Potential Employees Online

When Jackson National Life Insurance Co. launched its initial social media campaign this summer, it had one target audience in mind: society.

Rather than tout its annuity products to potential customers, Jackson aimed for a broader segment of the community, says Danielle Weller, corporate responsibility specialist for the company, which employs about 2,000 people in the Lansing area.

Among the goals of the social media campaign unveiled in July were engaging community members through Twitter, Facebook and YouTube to increase awareness and attendance at Jackson-sponsored community events; promoting awareness of Jackson's and its employees' volunteer efforts; and reaching the next generation of Jackson's work force through its preferred method of communication — social media.

During the first month after launch, the campaign attracted 75 followers on Twitter and 96 fans on Facebook, a response that encouraged Jackson officials. (You can find Jackson on Twitter, YouTube and Facebook by searching for “Jackson Involved.”)

The social media initiative was in keeping with the goal of a series of television and Web ads unveiled in January that also highlighted employees' volunteerism. The ads will continue to air on Lansing-area television stations throughout the

year and are also accessible on Jackson's website ([www.jackson.com](http://www.jackson.com)) and YouTube.

They feature Jackson employees talking about their volunteer work with such organizations as the Alzheimer's Association and Big Brothers Big Sisters.

The ads' placement on the community page of Jackson's website also helps draw attention to grant applications for nonprofits and additional information about Jackson's charitable focus and direction.

An overriding goal of the ads and the broader social media campaign is to promote Jackson as a good place to work, Weller says.

When Jackson officials were studying the company's branding efforts three years ago, they concluded there was relatively low awareness of Jackson as a big employer, she says.

Because the company's business model doesn't involve direct selling to the public — its products instead are sold through independent financial advisers — Jackson does little mass marketing. Rather, most of its business advertising is done through trade publications that cater to financial advisers, Weller says.

“We don't look to local community-focused advertising as a way to get business, but more as a way to look for employees,” she says.

The community ads and social media initiatives also send a message to existing employees that Jackson values corporate responsibility. That, in turn, makes company workers “brand ambassadors” who will tout Jackson as a good place to work, Weller says.

Beyond the ads, Jackson's social media outreach includes sending tweets about activities it is sponsoring and posting pictures from past events or details about upcoming events on its Facebook page.

To be sure, beyond positioning

itself as a good employer, there are other practical aspects to the social media campaign, according to Jackson officials. It could augment or partially replace paid local brand advertising, as well as cultivate an army of brand ambassadors in the general public.

Whatever its uses, Jackson approaches social media carefully because the insurance industry is so highly regulated — not to mention that Jackson itself is “a fairly conservative company,” Weller says. For example, company policy limits use of social networking for business purposes by employees.

### TBD Enterprises Learns by the Book

An old medium — a book — spelled out the road to online success for Bernie Ritchey and Tom Washburn.

The pair, best friends for the past 17 years, were let go from their sales manager positions at an Auburn Hills



Bernie Ritchey, co-owner of TBD Enterprises, said when he lost his job, he either needed to start a business or leave Michigan.

robotic integration company when the economy soured.

“When everything crashed in 2008, they did away with most of their sales staff,” Ritchey says. “It was really scary. All of the sudden, you’re out of work and there’s not a lot of people hiring in Michigan. It was pretty much start a business, or move out of state.”

So Ritchey, now 44, and



*Tom Washburn, co-founder of TBD Enterprises, uses social networking to generate online buzz about his company.*

Washburn, 43, decided to combine two things they knew — sales and automation machinery — and create TBD Enterprises, a Southfield-based manufacturers’ representative sales company. Since launching TBD Enterprises in March 2009, they have quoted more than \$12 million in production and robotic systems and closed on a good percentage of that business, Ritchey says.

Somewhat ironically, it was manufacturers’ struggles that helped them get the business rolling. Like their former employer, similar companies were also slashing their sales staffs and farming out operations to sales reps. Ritchey’s and Washburn’s

backgrounds in robotics and manufacturing helped them land contracts with some of those companies.

But it was tricks learned in “eBoot Camp: Proven Internet Marketing Techniques to Grow Your Business,” a book by Corey Perlman, that took TBD Enterprises to new heights, Ritchey says.

“That book has really changed our lives, and I’ve turned lots of other people on to it,” he says, adding that he learned about it by seeing Perlman speak at a Better Business Bureau function in Ann Arbor.

Ritchey credits information he and Washburn gleaned from “eBoot Camp” for helping them develop online marketing and social media campaigns that have generated contacts from customers in Pakistan, Greece, Sweden and other parts of the world.

The book details how to build a presence on the Web, which is different from just being on the Web, Ritchey explains.

Ritchey and Washburn take advantage of virtually every major online and social media tool. In addition to their website, they maintain a Facebook page, post videos on YouTube and maintain a Twitter account.

They improved their search engine results by asking customers what keywords or phrases they use to search for industry information online. “That was a huge help,” Ritchey says. He and Washburn were using tech terms that they figured were most relevant, but they weren’t necessarily the same as those used by their customers.

The refined terminology helps them come up higher in search results than even the companies they represent, Ritchey says. “Many of those companies have even asked us to help them with their social media and marketing,” he says.

The partners also generate online buzz by using tools such as the Free

Press Release website to, for instance, issue an announcement about securing a new company to represent.

It’s also important to practice proper online protocol, which includes not using social media outlets as sales tools, Ritchey says.

“You wouldn’t go to the grocery store and start hassling people to buy your products,” Ritchey says. “It gets old real quick if you have people trying to sell you stuff on LinkedIn.

“Those are the things that we use to get people to go to our website,” Ritchey says. “That’s where we sell.”

For example, Ritchey may send out a tweet noting he has updated his blog on the company website.

Ritchey says it doesn’t require any great expertise to develop effective online marketing and social media campaigns.

“You don’t have to be a techie to understand how to do it,” he says.

But one thing is clear: Without the online tools, TBD Enterprises wouldn’t be having the success it is now, Ritchey says.

“Before the Internet, sales was relationships and cold calling,” he says. “I wouldn’t be knocking on doors in the Netherlands, but now people from the Netherlands are coming to me.”

### **RunGreen.com Changes Shopping Cart, Rings Up Sales**

The right software can translate into hard, cold cash.

That’s what Paul Bondsfield, e-commerce manager for RunGreen.com, learned after the site switched in 2007 to 3DCart’s shopping cart software. Every website uses some form of shopping cart software to assist people in making purchases.

RunGreen.com, based in Holland, Mich., sells John Deere merchandise and paraphernalia, such as backpacks, pajamas, hats, toys and T-shirts.

The site is owned by Fillmore

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