

The NetGain Journey

NetGain has been the recipient of numerous national industry awards and has been recognized for outstanding leadership, but do you know how we became NetGain...or where we are headed next?

NetGain was founded in July 1995 with the mission of helping Ohio businesses use their data. Ironically, the company did not fully meet its mission until 2021.

NetGain was originally part of a 53-year-old company called Rath (originally called Rath Forms Bureau, then Rath Resources and Automation, and finally – Rath Information Systems) which by 1995 had become one of the Top 100 printed forms distributors in the nation. (every Honda produced in Marysville had Rath-printed tags for example)

Dean Horn, the 2nd owner and the President and CEO of Rath, foresaw a transition from paper-based documents to electronic document management solutions. Dean recruited Mike Minnich to start and run a new company, funded by Rath, focused on these EDM solutions. Dean was a great salesman and soon the two co-owned – Access Visions Corporation (mostly called AVC or Access).

Four months later, while attending COMDEX, a computer trade show, the two heard Bill Gates deliver *Information at Your Fingertips*. Gates called his remarks “a pivotal speech in Microsoft’s history” and in it, he described the urgency and importance of leveraging the World Wide Web (what the Internet was called at that time).

On the plane ride home from Las Vegas, Dean said “we need to become the first ISP in the area.” That led to a flurry of activity – researching Internet backbone circuits, modems, routers, switches, servers, upstream ISP, critical services – and the new offering – Logan.net was launched on February 15, 1996. (it was in partnership with the Logan County Chamber, thanks to its then-CEO Jack Reser sensing a need to for the Chamber to help bring the Internet to the County by loaning AVC some equipment money and handling the new client sign-ups and Netscape browser discs (our offices were located south of Bellefontaine and the Chamber was conveniently downtown).

Logan.net grew quickly.

Don Fraser introduced us to Union Rural Electric Cooperative in 1998 – when URE was searching for a new upstream ISP. The growth exploded. We renamed the ISP “2access.net” as the territory expanded outside of Logan County. At its height, combined customer volume was ~ 7000 users, when considering both business and residential clients.

This was the beginning of a number of “firsts” in the business life of the company that became NetGain:

1995 – First time Logan Countians saw Bill Gates speak in person. Ingram Micro was our first vendor account.

1996 – First Area Internet Service Provider; hired our first employees; one server engineer (Novell NetWare), an accountant/assistant, a full-time help desk technician, and a part-time tech Luke Skidmore, 16-year-old HS student

1997 – Logan.Net bought its own routers, circuits and servers and became a standalone ISP, two of our four employees left – and Jim Lange joined the company in June as a Novell NetWare engineer (AVC did work for his former employer and Jim was impressed with our work)

1998 – AVC standardized on Cisco equipment. Bought \$200K of it to run the ISP. Two servers had grown to roughly twenty; and we were selected as one of Akamai's first local ISPs to host their server cluster.

On the networking side, we had added staff, and were billing 80% of their time in blocks.

1999 – 2access.net went pure digital. First Cisco phone system in the region was in our offices!

Other changes: the phone company built fiber into our building and placed a bunch of equipment so we could buy huge pipes. We outsourced the residential help desk. Jerry Stout, our CFO, challenged whether we were a document management company or an Internet company. He was right. We were an Internet company.

2000 - Happy Y2K! We were all celebrating with families but on connections to the office where we tirelessly monitored servers, routers, switches, and connections – as well as client's infrastructures. The “meltdown” of IT did not happen. Dean announced a merge of the 5 companies and Rath *Information Systems* was born with 100 employees, 10 in IT. AVC was a thing of the past. Our first merger.

2001 – Our first move. A year of solid growth. We outgrew our US 68 South building and everyone except the Internet Help Desk techs and a server engineer moved to the “North Office” – on Main Street. Enterprise car rental is there now. Dean was running for County Commissioner and hoped to join Jack Reser in that role. He lost the election. 9-11 rocked our world. COMDEX was cancelled. It never recovered fully. We never went back.

2002 – Our first DSL connections were added because broadband quickly moved to displace dial-up ISPs. Dean announced his retirement in March. Most of this year was spent in figuring out how to separate the merged business into units. On December 17, 2002, we signed all the documents in our first “spin-off”. NetGain was born and became active 1-2-2003.

2003 – Our first year on “our own”. 8 people, back-to-back in a tunnel-like office. From a profitability standpoint, best year to date. This was our first year in Ingram Micro's VentureTech Network, now known as Trust X Alliance.

2004 – NetGain joined True Profit Groups, where we compared our company's key performance benchmarks against other non-competing companies – the beginning of a new era in our growth. We moved to an office we remodeled at Mike's farm in DeGraff. Luke Skidmore joins NetGain full-time, after graduating with BS/MS degrees.

2005 – Mike was appointed to the Board of Trustees at Urbana University – NetGain was asked to implement a \$3.1MM Technology Plan for one-fourth of that amount. We partnered with other local companies to make it happen. Fiber installation day saw UU faculty, staff and students pulling cable in handholes – and providing 10Gbps of connectivity where

dial-up modems existed before. Service Leadership leads NetGain to Managed Services pricing and implementation models.

- 2006 – Mike Conrad of CT Communications and Mike developed the grand idea of jointly building a community-based fiber network in Logan County. Fiber Farms concept was born. NetGain converts all block-time clients to Managed Services.
- 2007 – Implemented Verne Harnish’s One-Page Strategic Planning *Mastering the Rockefeller Habits* with a set meeting cadence, including a daily all-staff huddle.
- 2008 – NetGain named to Inc. Magazine’s List of the 5000 Fastest Growing Private Companies in America and CRN’s Fast Growth 100. NetGain was an early adopter for e-mail defense and other services purchased through Ingram. Rob Strayer joins NetGain as Network Engineer.
- 2009 – NetGain named Ingram’s Services Partner of the Year. Launched Cisco hosted unified communications in our own cloud. The first three fiber-rings in Logan County were launched. Mary Rutan Hospital, Logan County, and NetGain had 1 to 10Gbps connectivity to each site and the Internet. 2nd year on Inc. 5000 List and CRN’s Fast Growth 100. Microsoft Gold Partner recognition.
- 2010 – NetGain outgrew the DeGraff location – leased a NOC at 220 Reynolds Ave. 3rd year on Inc. 5000 List. Recognized as one of CRN’s 40 Most Innovative MSPs.
- 2011 – Kelly Jones on board as COO in April. Fortune 500 experience and strategy comes to NetGain. Consolidated operations into Reynolds Ave. in November. Kelly becomes a shareholder and adds President to her title. NetGain’s 4th year on the Inc. 5000.
- 2012 – 10Gbps fiber network to and from Columbus DataCenter.BZ (now Cologix) completed. Company achieves Advanced Collaboration Architecture Specialization from Cisco. MSPMentor names NetGain as #121 on the Top 200 MSPs in North America – the first-ever such list. CEO Michael Minnich honored in MSPmentor 250 Report as world-leading MSP executive. Purchases 128 West Columbus building. CompTIA MSP Partner Trustmark. Derecho strikes Logan County Courthouse – NetGain assists employees in dramatic, quick move to other locations. Business downtown is zero – as reported by the Columbus Dispatch.
- 2013 – Hire additional resources to expand service hours from 8x5 to 24x7x365. NetGain acquires Recovery Site Logistics. Bringing DR planning expertise from Fred Schwanke and partnering with IBM and other large companies. Minnich named Chamber Entrepreneur of the Year and recognized by Ohio Senate for his work.
- 2014 – Nine Nines formed to handle NetGain real estate needs. 128 West Columbus main floor renovation complete. 24x7x365 NOC located in that building. Acquired CT Communications Bellefontaine clients. Designated a Cisco Cloud and Managed Services Provider.

- 2015 – NetGain named to CRN Magazine’s MSP 500 List as one of the MSP Pioneer 250. Kelly Jones named to prestigious CRN Women of the Channel, and Power 50 lists recognizing outstanding female executives.
- 2016 – NetGain adds security focus; joins FBI InfraGard group to contribute to protecting U.S. critical infrastructure. NetGain helps found the Ohio Internet Exchange, a peering point for carriers, ISPs and content providers. Luke Skidmore, CTO elected to the Ohio IX Board.
- 2017 – NetGain moves into 128 West Columbus; as Marker Inc. completes full renovation of the facility and addition of a new data center.
- 2018 – NetGain acquires dark fiber on “Southern Route” to Columbus, implements 100Gbps redundant core network in 4 Central Ohio PoPs connecting NetGain to multiple Columbus Metro data centers. Kelly Jones named to US President for Ingram Micro Trust X Alliance Council.
- 2019 – NetGain acquires Techknowlogic and expands its reach into Marysville and Dublin. Kelly and Mike begin confidential search for a strategic partner to take NetGain to the next level. NetGain partners with Arctic Wolf to launch 24x7 Security Operations Center and Security Bundles for SMB clients.
- 2020 – NetGain celebrates its 25th anniversary in an unprecedented year for our team, our clients and our community as COVID-19 affects daily life and remote work, which Luke Skidmore says “NetGain has been preparing for this its entire life.” NetGain ranked 175 on the MSPMentor 500 Global MSP List. Named Best of Logan County for IT Services.
- 2021 – NetGain joins Aanalytics...and NetGain now has a platform to help clients use data to transform their business. Stay tuned because there is more to come as we leverage data to transform lives.