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## SMALL BUSINESS

# GROWTH TOOLS

## ENTREPRENEUR

### Changes on the menu Omni Career Search



BY MARC BERUSALI / BUSINESS JOURNAL

Michael Minichello, Mike White and Tab Glass say Omni Career Search's expansion provided the impetus to revamp the firm's structure.

#### Growth chart

**Name:** Omni Career Search  
**Business:** Staffing services  
**Location:** Norwell  
**Founded:** 1981  
**Revenue:** \$1.3 million  
**Principals:** Mike White, Tab Glass, Michael Minichello

## Staffing firm finds a complementary addition to its service lines in restaurant division

BY SEAN MCFADDEN JOURNAL STAFF

It's a classic case of an entrepreneur recognizing a market opportunity and running with it.

When **Tab Glass** brought on **Mike White** as a business partner at Norwell-based staffing firm **Omni Career Search** in 2002, it was with the intent to roll out a new division of the firm — one that was focused on high-touch permanent placement services for the restaurant industry.

Mike White presented the impetus. A veteran of the industry, whose professional experience had included operational roles with **T.G.I. Friday's** and **The Ground Round**, White said he had often dealt with recruiting firms he felt didn't really take the time to properly screen the candidates they were placing or to understand a restaurant's concept.

"I knew there was a niche market for this," said White, 44, who was officially appointed CEO of Omni in 2005.

Omni's core business since its inception as South Shore Personnel in 1981 has been the temporary and permanent placement of staff in office support, light industrial, manufacturing and warehouse positions for a variety of industries. The expansion of its business model with the restaurant division had the added benefit of bringing some much-needed structure to the organization, according to the principals.

"The company wouldn't be what it is today without it," said Glass, 39.

White added that launching the new division prompted the company to create a Web site and a more organized electronic database

of candidates, improve its marketing strategies, provide support for sales, outsource its payroll, and upgrade its billing system and the office in general.

A couple of years ago, the principals estimated all facets of the restaurant division contributed about 40 percent of Omni's total revenue. Last year, that dipped to 30 percent, with the other 70 percent coming from their traditional office support/light industrial temporary division.

"Some years, the business probably would have gone belly up if it weren't for the restaurant division. But, right now, the temp division is definitely driving the bus," said Glass. "They really do complement each other from a cash flow standpoint."

Total revenue for the company, which has five full-time staff members, was \$1.3 million in 2009, up from \$900,000 in 2008. For this year, the principals are projecting \$1.4 million.

The office support/light industrial temporary division, whose clients include **Zildjian Co.**, **Grossman's Bargain Outlet** and **Brady Enterprises Inc.**, supplies anywhere from 50 to 90 temps daily in Massachusetts, said Glass, who heads up that division.

On the restaurant side, Omni filled 39 permanent positions last year, including executive chefs, general managers and CFOs. So far this year, it's already filled nine positions, as compared with five last year at this time.

Based on what he's observed recently, **Peter Christie**, president of the **Massachusetts Restaurant Association**, said the industry has most likely turned a corner.

"I think the industry had really gotten down to bare bones with its staffing over the

last few years. And now, we are starting to gear up again — but we're doing it with great caution," he said.

Omni's restaurant clients include both chains and independent operations, such as **Bertucci's**, **Au Bon Pain** and **Barrett Restaurant Group**, which owns **The Charlie Horse** and **Abington Ale House & Grille**.

Client **Richard Vellante**, executive chef and executive vice president of restaurants for Boston-based **Legal Sea Foods**, said, "They've been very quick and responsive to find the right individuals, based on our needs. They'll spend the time to perform the necessary due diligence."

As part of its strategy to grow this segment, Omni's restaurant division is now providing temporary placement services.

A key driver of that growth will be **Michael Minichello**, who was brought on as a third partner last November and serves as the restaurant division's president. Minichello, who was formerly a client of Omni's, previously served as director of human resources for **Not Your Average Joe's** and director of recruitment at **Legal Seafoods**.

"To get somebody with the type of experience Michael has is a huge homerun for us," White said.

Equally key is that the division has diversified its services over the years.

It offers financial and sales strategy consulting services. It also offers a loss prevention, or "integrity shop," program, as it's known, in which an Omni staff member will monitor the activity within a restaurant to ensure that there aren't any loopholes in the operation. Additionally, there is the "mystery shop," which evaluates how a restaurant

serves a patron throughout the entire dining experience. The business engages 63 outside "shoppers," who have a minimum of three years of restaurant industry experience.

For the shop programs, Omni has invested in a Web-based program that, White said, enables any Microsoft Windows-based phone to operate the software. It also enables reports to be distributed in real time, so that the recipient will receive immediate feedback on a staff member. Version 3 of the program, which will allow clients to see how they're performing against their competition, will be rolled out in the second quarter.

Omni next plans to launch a management company for restaurants. The principals said they are currently in negotiations with a "prominent local restaurateur" for that service.

Said Minichello, 42, "The potential is to create an entirely new line of business for us and an entirely new revenue source."

Reinvention has, in fact, been a consistent characteristic of the company.

Glass' mother, **Linda**, purchased the business, then known as **South Shore Personnel**, from original owner **Paul Verrochi** in 1987. Glass took over ownership from his mother 10 years later and changed the name to **Omni Personnel**. After White came on as a partner in 2002, the company was incorporated as **Omni Restaurant Search Inc.**, doing business as **Omni Career Search**.

In a competitive marketplace for its services, the partners said they've strived for constant attention to detail and follow-through with their customers. "We're looking to build long-term relationships, not just supply bodies," White said.