

IT firm creates connection with remote workers

BY MALIA SPENCER

From the outset, managers at Questeq worked to create a company culture of engagement, collaboration and personal connections.

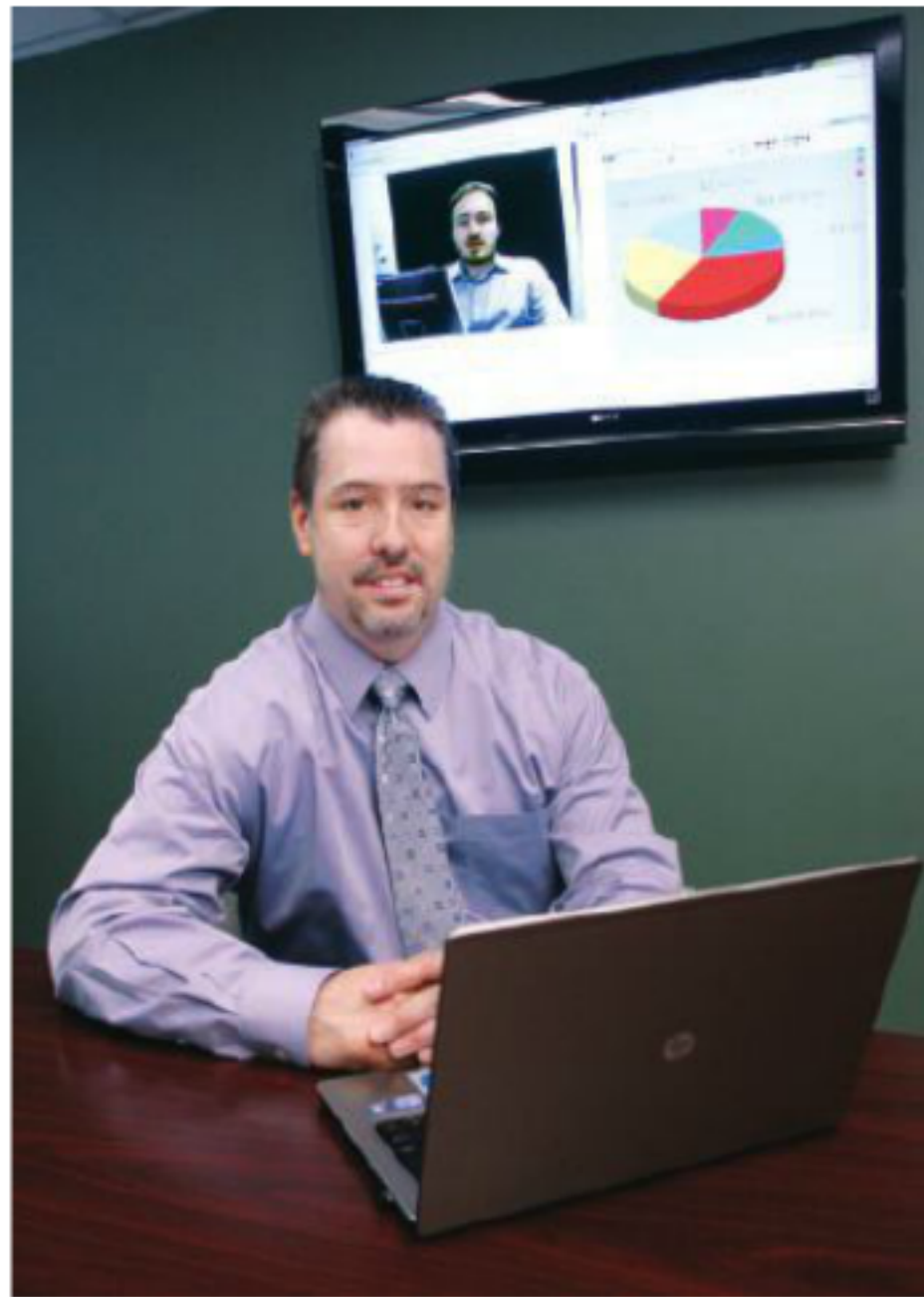
But, as the IT management firm has grown, scaling that culture — which is key to the company's 89 percent employee retention rate — was becoming a challenge, CEO Jeff Main said.

A disconnect was forming, he said, as the company's employees were spending five days a week, 50 weeks a year, working at client sites.

"Trying to build a Questeq culture and engage people into the culture is challenging when they don't work on the company grounds," Main said.

Email doesn't fill the void. Body language is lost in text-only communication and using emoticons is awkward, creating impersonal exchanges, he said.

On top of that, the company has established a practice that has directors and managers holding face-to-face meetings with employees and clients. With more employees heading to farther-flung client locations, that gets expensive and



JOE WOJCIK

Jeff Main, CEO of Questeq, said the company has improved employee passion and retention by finding ways for them to connect even though most of them work off-site at client offices.

time consuming.

"As we grow and see opportunities for business in other states, we may not be able to visit all these employees in the future," Main said. "That was kind of scary for us — (it would) break the cycle and the culture."

To solve the problem, Main and his team turned

to video conferencing. However, the company didn't want to invest in an expensive package that could cost thousands of dollars. Instead, the team used its existing Microsoft partnership to leverage Microsoft's new cloud video conferencing services. They used existing cameras in desktops and

Questeq

IT services for K-12 school districts

BASED: Moon Township

FOUNDED: 1983

EMPLOYEES: 65

REVENUE: \$5.5 million

WEBSITE: www.questeq.com

■ **CHALLENGE:** How to engage employees so they have a personal connection with the company when they spend the majority of their time working at a client site.

■ **SOLUTION:** Questeq created an economical, in-house video conferencing system and uses it to remotely hold meetings.

laptops, incorporated live video and instant messaging into the system.

"We looked at the resources and took advantage of it," Main said. "With the cloud-based system, we didn't have to invest in infrastructure. We started it overnight."

The question was whether this virtual meeting environment would equal face-to-face and so far, Main said, it does. In fact, employees are now using it to meet with each other and are collaborating across projects.

"We think the biggest thing from a customer standpoint is the engineers are able to collaborate quicker with our pool of knowledge," he said. "Customer retention is better, and employees seem to be happier. We have the personal interaction with the company and other people. That was missing, (and) you can't get it from IM or email — you need the real-time video."

In the last five to seven years, employee engagement has become an area of focus for companies, said James Craft, professor of business administration at the University of Pittsburgh Katz Graduate School of Business.

It's a concept that reflects the degree of attachment employees have to a company and passion for their work, he said.

In the case of Questeq, the company's attempt at engagement also has given employees a platform to create their own corporate social network.

These types of corporate networks, Craft said, can have a direct effect on the bottom line by boosting productivity, sometimes as much as 10 percent, and substantially increasing retention.