

Ahead of the curve

How Peter Ranzino went from pitching the internet to building two Inc. 5000 companies

By Dillon Lowe



In the late '90s, Peter Ranzino would walk into Baton Rouge boardrooms carrying a projector and a PowerPoint presentation about a technology many executives still barely understood: the internet.

He'd explain how companies could someday train employees online instead of gathering them in conference rooms or flying them across the country for seminars. In Baton Rouge, he says, the reaction was often confusion.

"They'd look around and go, 'What's this guy talking about? Internet? What?'" Ranzino recalls with a laugh.

Then he'd drive to Houston and deliver the same presentation to oil and gas executives.

"They'd go, 'Hire the guy. We need that.'"

Nearly three decades later, Ranzino finds himself one of Baton Rouge's more successful tech entrepreneurs. Not one but two of his companies—[Learning Sciences Corp.](#) and [Pulse eCitation Solutions](#)—last year landed on the Inc. 5000 list of America's fastest-growing private companies, an uncommon feat for any entrepreneur, much less one who has operated largely outside the spotlight.

The two businesses occupy very different corners of the tech world. Learning Sciences builds large-scale web-based training programs for Fortune 1000 companies and governmental entities. Pulse builds handheld electronic citation devices used by law enforcement agencies across Louisiana.

But both companies emerged from the same instinct that has guided Ranzino's career since the early days of the internet: identifying operational bottlenecks and figuring out how technology can streamline them.

SELLING THE FUTURE

Ranzino entered the e-learning business before most people even called it e-learning.

His first such company, Flying Fish Ventures, launched in 1995, when the internet crawled through dial-up modems and email itself still felt novel to much of corporate America. At the time, he was a partner in a video production company and began wondering whether the internet could someday become a viable content distribution platform.

"This little thing called the internet popped up and I started thinking, 'Wow, what if I could distribute content through that?'" he says.

Ranzino started not with a finished product but with a customer. He was able to sell the idea of a web-based learning platform to a client—global insurance brokerage J&H Marsh & McLennan—before he'd even begun development. As he was building the actual product, the brokerage bought him out to secure ownership of the relevant intellectual property, and he used the proceeds to launch another e-learning company, Flying Fish Creative Services, which he grew through much of the 2000s.

Eventually, after differences arose over that company's direction, he stepped away. He spent the next year riding a motorcycle and waiting out a noncompete agreement.

"I was too young to retire and too old to work that hard," he quips.

When the noncompete expired, he launched Learning Sciences Corp. from a subleased 10-by-10 office furnished with little more than a folding table, a lawn chair and a telephone. The year was 2008.

"It was what I knew," he says. "I'd gone through all the different lifecycles of learning technologies. It was just what I knew."

From those humble beginnings grew a company that today works with household names like Disney, Fox, Citgo and ConocoPhillips.

Learning Sciences specializes in building custom web-based learning platforms, particularly for regulatory compliance and workforce training. It develops the curricula with the assistance of subject matter experts, creates the content and, more often than not, hosts and manages the platforms for its clients.

The company has built its reputation on courses that go well beyond simple "click next" modules.

"It's not just checking a box," Ranzino says. "People actually have to learn in our courses. Everyone's been through online courses where you go next, next, next, and you hope you get eight out of 10 true-or-false questions right or whatever. We don't do that. We make people engage."

One of Learning Sciences' flashier assignments involves training NBC Sports production crews for the Olympics. The company develops orientation and training platforms for the thousands of employees who work the Summer and Winter Games, covering everything from emergency protocols and venue logistics to specialized safety training for camera crews operating high above arenas and stadiums.

"Even the celebrities and hosts on the air have to go through the training," Ranzino says. "That's a pretty cool deal."

Over the years, Learning Sciences' client list expanded largely through relationships and referrals. A successful project with one division of a company often led to opportunities

elsewhere within that same organization—or at entirely different companies when executives changed jobs. Along the way, the work gave Ranzino access to some of the nation's top corporate minds.

"The greatest thing about our business is the people we get to meet," he says. "We get to enter the C-suite and hear how these people think about business at a very, very high level."

Listening in on those conversations became its own form of business education. "It was like my Harvard," he says.

Despite the company's success, Louisiana never became a major market for Learning Sciences. Ranzino estimates that more than 90% of the company's business comes from outside the state.

Part of that stems from the realities of corporate geography. Many large industrial companies operating in Louisiana make purchasing decisions from corporate offices in Dallas or Houston, not Baton Rouge. But Louisiana was also just slower than other markets to embrace e-learning during the company's formative years.

"Web-based learning was evolving, evolving, evolving," Ranzino says, "and there just wasn't a lot of technology being invested in here at that time."

That dynamic ultimately gave Learning Sciences an unusual distinction as a Baton Rouge tech company serving major national clients while flying relatively under the radar locally.

As he was building the company, Ranzino would hear time and time again that he needed to pack up and move to Silicon Valley, Atlanta or Austin, Texas, if he wanted to truly take the business to the next level. But he stayed in Louisiana, mainly for personal reasons but also because he had little interest in building a sprawling tech empire. Even now, the company operates with a modest eight employees.

"I never tried to be Google," Ranzino says. "I was just happy running a small, profitable company."

ANOTHER PROBLEM TO SOLVE

Unlike Learning Sciences, Pulse eCitation Solutions was never part of a long-term master plan. In fact, the company started almost by accident.

Through Learning Sciences' work with district attorneys and public safety agencies, Ranzino developed relationships within Louisiana law enforcement circles. Around 2017, he was asked over lunch whether he thought he might be able to improve upon the citation systems then on the market.

Existing systems were cumbersome and ill-suited for traffic stops. They relied on tablets and printers inside patrol vehicles, meaning officers had to repeatedly move back and forth between cars during stops. Officers wanted something safer and more efficient.

At first, Ranzino resisted the idea.

"I said, 'No, it's not in my wheelhouse' ... I didn't wake up one day and say I wanted to be in the e-citation business," he says.

But the conversations continued, and eventually he and his business partner, Gerald Zylicz Jr., were sold on the idea.

Over the next two years, they worked closely with police departments, sheriffs' offices and Louisiana State Police to develop a device capable of handling traffic stops from beginning to end entirely from the palm of an officer's hand.

The resulting product resembles a traditional ticket book more than a tablet. It enables officers to run background checks and print citations all without ever needing to return to their patrol cars and instantly feeds data into what's called the "Pulse Command Center," a citation database that integrates seamlessly with third-party record and case management systems.

"Our core mission here is to make what officers do on the side of the road safer," Ranzino says.

Pulse officially launched the product in 2021 and is now developing the third iteration. Today every Louisiana State Police trooper on patrol uses the device, as do wildlife agents and numerous municipal police departments and sheriff's offices across the state.

Russell Graham, public affairs commander with Louisiana State Police, says his agency adopted the Pulse devices as part of a larger push to advance its technological capabilities and improve efficiency. He says the device offers myriad benefits but notes in particular the value of the Pulse Command Center.

"The eCitation system has strengthened our ability to aggregate and analyze real-time data, integrate with existing platforms and identify emerging trends," Graham says. "These analytics directly inform training and operational decisions, allowing LSP to deliver professional, accountable and transparent public safety services."

Though it currently operates only in Louisiana, Pulse is preparing to expand into other states. Like Learning Sciences, it remains a lean operation with only eight employees.

It's worth noting that Pulse isn't the only player in the handheld e-citation game. It's competing with major firms like Motorola, CentralSquare and Tyler Technologies, companies that have far greater resources at their disposal. But Ranzino believes Pulse has an edge. In his telling, he and his team have designed an in-app workflow that's second to none.

"Any high school kid in computer 101 can build an Android app," he says. "That's not the magic. The magic is the workflow."

Looked at from a bird's-eye view, the story of Pulse is not dissimilar from the story of Learning Sciences. Ranzino, it would seem, likes to follow a fairly simple entrepreneurial formula: Identify the opportunity and find the client first. Worry about building the actual product later.

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