

STRATEGIES

New venture pushes Hispanic business growth

BY NICOLE QUEEN
Denver Business Journal

When Sal Gomez was president of the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce in the early 1980s, he saw there was a lack of information available to small business owners and entrepreneurs — especially Hispanics.

So he set up offices around the nation where business owners could get information essential to owning a company, what Gomez called the three M's of business: money, markets and management. However, they drew little interest and closed in the mid-'80s, Gomez said.

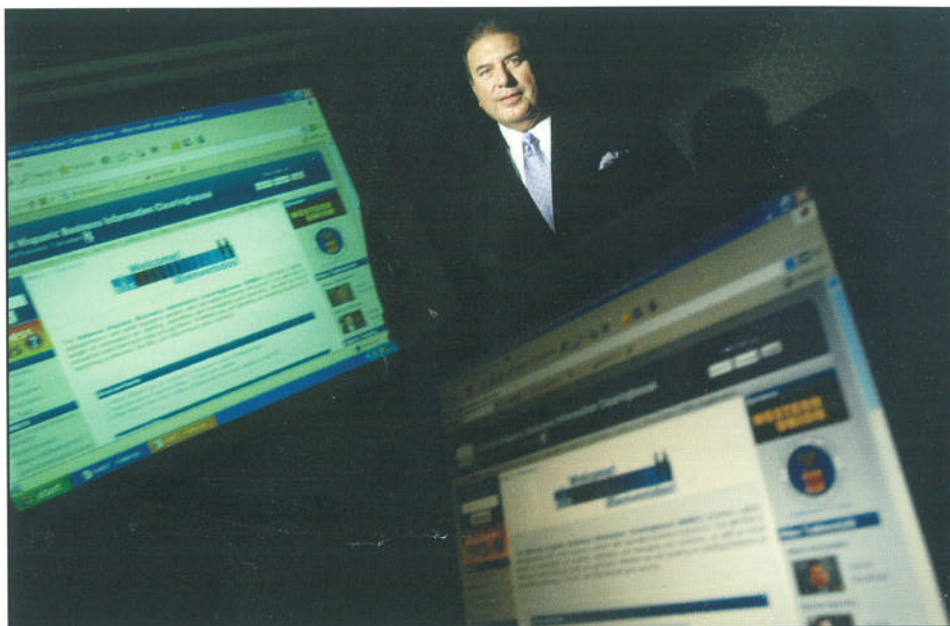
But the growth of the Internet motivated Gomez, 61 and CEO of Denver's Source One Management Inc., an information management company that serves corporations and the federal government, to try again. He launched the nonprofit National Hispanic Business Information Clearinghouse (NHBIC) website on Sept. 14, 2007.

The site comprises:

- Information from about 250 business websites.
- Video training about business-related topics, and links to resources for everything from how to read a financial statement to tax, credit and loan information.
- NHBIC also has links for Hispanic immigrants who are looking to start a business, including how to obtain citizenship and/or to renew visas and green cards, and living in the United States.

First Data Corp. and Western Union were the main sponsors last September, and the latter remains NHBIC's lead corporate sponsor, contributing approximately \$2 million thus far. Also, the U.S. Department of Labor has contributed \$3.3 million for NHBIC to use over three years.

NHBIC is operated from Source One's Denver office and has seven employees,



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Sal Gomez is president and CEO of Source One Management in Denver, as well as founder and program project director of the National Hispanic Business Information Clearinghouse.

AT A GLANCE

National Hispanic Business Information Clearinghouse

Address: 1225 17th St., Suite 1500, Denver, 80202
Employees: Seven
Phone: 1-877-502-6771
Website: www.nhbic.org

including business analysts, programmers and designers. “Many immigrants that come to the United States ... they come from environments that are entrepreneurial,” said Gomez, whose parents emigrated from Mexico. “When people come to the United States, they carry that same [entrepreneurial] spirit with them.”

Gomez wanted the site to be free, offer a Spanish version and have up-to-date information that business owners could easily access.

Two months ago, Michael Barrera, 48, took over as president of NHBIC, while Gomez remains the program project director. Barrera was president and CEO of the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce in

2005 and served as national ombudsman for the U.S. Small Business Administration in 2001.

NHBIC plans to expand into other American cities with high Hispanic populations, such as New York City and Los Angeles, and just launched its second site, in Dallas, on April 10. In addition to general information about starting and maintaining a business, they will include specific, local information relative to the city.

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Cici Rojas, president and CEO of the greater Dallas Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, said the chamber is looking for-

GOMEZ: Other cities to get sites

ward to providing Dallas-specific information to its local business owners.

"Business owners are business owners, and the challenges to start a business are the same, but there are barriers that are unique [to Hispanic immigrants]," Rojas said. "That is what sets [NHBIC] apart. It will be user-friendly to people who have been here second- and third-generation, but also to the people who've just come here who have a dream to start their own business."

As NHBIC launches more city sites, it expects a corresponding increase in the number of site visitors.

"[The Denver] launch gives us 10,000 hits a month," Gomez said. "And Dallas/Fort Worth has 1.8 million Hispanics, so once that's rolled out, we expect hits will increase exponentially." He indicated that sites in New York, Los Angeles and Chicago could generate 1 million hits monthly.

NHBIC plans to partner with local Hispanic chambers and organizations as it adds sites in other cities.

"Oftentimes, members trust the information more if it's coming from their organizations," Gomez said.

NHBIC has partnered with the Denver Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. The chamber's website added a link to the NHBIC site, which generated another 500 unique hits a month.



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Sal Gomez says the NHBIC concept may spread to other ethnic groups, and to Europe and Mexico.

"[NHBIC's] empowers small businesses to have an engine that will contribute to their success," said Jeff Campos, president and CEO of the Denver Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. "It's definitely an enhancement to our memberships, and we're going to start implementing it into our training and orientation."

Gomez said, "One of our overarching goals in this project is to create wealth in the Hispanic community. And in turn, doing so is creating a healthier economic environment in the United States."

He also plans to create similar sites for blacks, Asian-Americans and Native Americans. Sites for the first two groups will be launched within one year, Barrera and Gomez said. The Asian site will be offered in Mandarin, Korean and Vietnamese.

Gomez also hopes to launch a general national business information clearinghouse as an umbrella site for all of the ethnic sites. And there are international possibilities as well.

Gomez said Maurice Camps, general coordinator of international affairs of Mexico City, approached him about starting a BIC in Mexico. He also said Western Union has talked to authorities in Haiti and the Dominican Republic to offer similar services, and that he's been contacted about starting a similar site for Eastern European immigrants who wish to start businesses in Europe.

Fred Niehaus, vice president of public affairs for Western Union, said its partnership with NHBIC reinforces the company's goal to reach out to communities on a national and international level.

"I have no doubt that this is going to grow significantly ... [NHBIC] is targeted toward empowerment and entrepreneurship," he said. "It doesn't happen overnight, but it's in the long-term agenda."