

# The Warren Sheaf

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## **InvisiMax Shifting Its Focus To Greater Service For Users**

With the approach of its fifth anniversary, InvisiMax, an Internet service provider headquartered at Warren, has been shifting its focus from service area growth to an increased range of communications and computer services for its customers.

To match its evolving mission, the wireless broadband provider has seen gradual changes in its staff of a dozen employees, including two part-timers, says Dave Giles, president of the firm. While the main emphasis two or three years ago was hardware oriented, installing new equipment to add customers in the approximately 35 communities served, there has since been a shift to responding to the needs of those customers, he says. Enhancing the services offered by InvisiMax has been largely customer driven, says Giles. "Once a customer gets experience with high-speed Internet service and sees what they can do with it, they want to go to the next level," he says. "Some of the products we're introducing respond to that." He explains that among technology companies such as InvisiMax, the term product usually means a largely service-oriented set of tasks offered to improve performance or usability of a customer's computer system.

One thing InvisiMax has been hearing from their customers is that they would like help in dealing with computer problems like viruses or in upgrading computer hardware. "We have been responding to these service requests all along and have demonstrated to ourselves that we can effectively meet these service needs," says Giles. "Now we are ready to more formally provide those kinds of services in the products we are offering." Starting last month, InvisiMax is inviting its customers to take their computers to either the Warren office at 126 West Johnson Avenue or the Hallock office at 411 South Fourth Street for services like virus and spyware removal, as well as basic hardware installation. For larger networks, the InvisiMax team can go on site to meet those needs. Another service the firm offers is called disaster recovery. This involves automatic backup of a customer's computer hard drive on a daily basis at a pre-set time convenient to the customer, usually during the night. The only thing the customer has to do is ensure the computer is left on. The remotely-done backup places the information in a secure, remote site to which the customer, and only the customer, has 24/7 access in the event it is needed to restore the computer system.

Farmers are excellent candidates for this service, says Giles. "Farms are now big business operations that are heavily dependent on their computer system," he says. "But, is their computer information safely stored and backed up properly? The time savings alone in avoiding restoring from scratch a computer system that has been wiped out is well worth the cost of the investment in a backup like our disaster recovery service." He also notes the disaster recovery service can be purchased from InvisiMax regardless of the customer's Internet service provider. "You do not need to be a current customer of an InvisiMax connection," he says. At the core of InvisiMax's increasing emphasis on enhanced customer service are a trio of specialists who, along with Jim TerWee, company vice president and senior technician, are providing leadership to the company's team of technicians.

Rick Kroll, recently promoted as customer service manager, moved back to this area in September 2003 to join InvisiMax. He formerly was technology coordinator for the Fargo public school system, where he was responsible for the district's 2,000 computers.

Mark Wimpfheimer, a second member of the team core, is also from this area. He expressed interest in working for InvisiMax several years ago, but the company encouraged him to go to college. He then completed a technical school curriculum and gained customer service experience working with SEI, Inc. in Grand Forks, where he spent a lot of his time working remotely on customers' system servers (computers). He achieved his goal of being hired by InvisiMax last September.

Third member of the company's customer service core is Josh Benson, who joined in January and was recently promoted to sales manager. Originally from the Fertile area, he has been employed in the Warren area the past few years. He has experience in many technical areas and also worked as customer service and sales manager for Best Buy.

InvisiMax came into existence in late 2001, when Giles and Phil Hebert, the company secretary-treasurer, purchased Rural Access, a small Internet service provider based at Hallock. Rural Access was formed by TerWee in 1996. The new company pushed forward under the theory that combining Hebert and Giles's organizational and marketing expertise with TerWee's extensive technical skill would create a strong contender in the region's broadband market.

Today, InvisiMax operates in a service area comprising all or part of nine counties in northwestern Minnesota and northeastern North Dakota.

"Things take longer and cost more than we had planned," says Giles. "But, in our fifth year, we are achieving some of the goals we had when we started. We're providing our partners and customers added value. And, we're providing jobs. Our main challenge is resistance to accepting and using new technology. But, the future is exciting. The opportunities for business and personal entertainment offered by the Internet are amazing, and we are excited to be a part of it."