

RETSKE REPORT



Gene Retske
Editor in Chief

anatomy of a story

WHEN THE STORY OF THE CENTURY TURNS OUT TO BE JUST A GOOD STORY

It was a dark and stormy night, and ...Wait! Hold it. It was not dark, it was the middle of the day, and, being July, it was sunny and hotter than Hades. But, a good story should start with mystery and intrigue, and we were sure that there would be plenty of that in the Ascent wireless subsidiary story that just crossed the wires. Imagine, a NON-PROFIT trade organization having a FOR PROFIT subsidiary. The editorial staff of *The Prepaid Press* was energized. This was an unprecedented move, we were sure. We were going to dig deep on this one, and get the real skivvy.

So, while visions of Pulitzers danced in our heads, we emailed Ascent and got a curiously quick response and an appointment for an interview. Next, we contacted the Association Association. This is not a typo, there really is an association of professional associations, called the American Society of Association Executives, located in Washington, D.C. We were sure that they would reinforce our theory that this move by Ascent was probably the first time this had ever happened, anywhere! Knowing that ASAE was in DC, we expected them to dodge us as long as they could get way with, but we were determined to persist.

I had barely gotten a sip of tea down after firing off my email inquiry to ASAE, when Sally, as I call her, said, "You have mail." What's this, a response from ASAE already? Must be an automated response, for sure.

Gene -

I'll give it a shot. What questions did you have?

That doesn't sound like an automated message, does it? We immediately sent them a series of questions about associations having subsidiaries, how these organizations structure the subsidiary, how conflicts are resolved - all the issues we thought could be deal breakers. OK, let's see what they have to say about that! We settled in for a long Summer's wait (just to continue the Night Before metaphor).

Just over an hour later, we got a detailed response from a spokesman for ASAE. That was pretty responsive, especially considering that these guys are in Washington, DC. To our amazement, we found out that the Ascent program is a fairly common practice for associations. In fact, 38% of all associations have some form of a for-profit subsidiary which provides a wide range of services, like healthcare and group purchasing programs, which the Ascent deal would resemble.

Hmmm? No story so far. Where is the mystery and intrigue? Time to dig deeper.

Next, we talked to several Ascent members, non-member interested parties and even Ascent Board members, all on the QT, of course. We felt confident that any dissenters would be more than willing to air their views. But, we could not find a single person in this group that had a single reservation about the new structure. In fact, all seemed either neutral or genuinely enthused about it. Odd.

Along the line, we went so far as to contact Ernie Kelly, who formerly ran Ascent, to get his views. Seems this idea had been kicking around for a long time, and for good reason. The mobile operators were becoming harder to deal as time went on, and Ascent members needed help. He gave it his enthusiastic stamp of approval.

Finally, with visions of a Pulitzer Prize rapidly fading, we held our interview with David Gusky, executive vice president of Ascent, and the sparkplug for this project. That was the final straw for us. We judged his plan was well thought out, carefully considered, and, well, logical. And, best of all, it seems to meet a genuine need for Ascent members. We were equally impressed with David. He is bright, energetic and has a good grasp of the job at hand. No one should underestimate the enormity of the task ahead for Ascent Business Solutions. They have a lot going for them, and, we are sure, many unanticipated bumps in the road. The upcoming number portability to be implemented this fall, will present significant opportunities and challenges, but the existence of ABS will give resellers and prepaid operators a tool that they would not have had otherwise.

In the end, we were convinced, but suggest you read the details and look into it for yourself. In the meantime, we are still looking for that big exposé. Any suggestions? ■

Read full coverage of Ascent Business Solutions in *The Prepaid Air Times* — page 19 - 24



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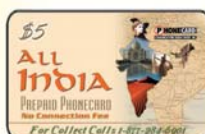


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