

From the Louisville Business First:

<http://www.bizjournals.com/louisville/print-edition/2015/10/23/fast-50-niche-in-tech-field-propels-conexus-rapid.html>

Fast 50

Fast 50: Niche in tech field propels Conexus' rapid growth

Growth: 1,270.48%

🔑 **SUBSCRIBER CONTENT:**

Oct 23, 2015, 6:00am EDT

When Richard Mills strolls through Paris, he can see his product through the windows of exclusive fashion boutiques and perfumeries.

"I go down the streets in Paris and I see our work in stores up and down the Champs-Élysées," Mills said of the iconic avenue in Paris. "It's kind of neat."

Mills, CEO and founder of Conexus World Global LLC, has led a company that posted a 1,270.48 percent growth in revenue in the last three years and therefore places No. 1 in Louisville Business First's 2015 Fast 50 ranking.

And Mills said the company is on track to show exponential growth in 2015 too.

"In 2014, we exploded," said Mills, a 59-year-old serial entrepreneur. "We are growing quite dramatically. This year, we will easily grow 500 percent" in revenue compared with 2014.



WILLIAM DESHAZER

Richard Mills is CEO of Conexus World Global LLC, this year's No. 1 Fast 50 company.

Mills, who has launched and sold roughly a dozen tech companies in his career, identified a slender niche in the technology industry in 2007 and 2008 that he believed was an untapped gold mine.

In 2010, he launched Conexus, a company that designs, installs, loads content and manages the digital TV screens in retail locations and airports around the world.

A new playing field

As a digital-asset management company in the digital-signage field, Conexus manages the screens that provide advertising content.

The video screens that display high-fashion models walking the catwalk, modeling clothes and pitching branded products in department stores and boutiques are the company's handiwork. Conexus also manages video screens in New York City's Times Square.

Conexus' high-profile clients include Chanel, Neiman Marcus, Gap Inc., Coach, Sephora and Levi Strauss & Co.

Mills' product also is located in 13 of the largest airports in the world. At those airports, the digital screens that provide advertising — not the ones with flight schedules — are installed and managed by Conexus. Any traveller waiting in those airports likely has viewed content on these screens.

"I've been in tech all my life," Mills said. "I read many, many technology publications and journals. It was clear that video was going to explode as our primary mode of communications."

Mills points to the phenomenal popularity of YouTube, Facebook and Skype as evidence of global citizens' preference for video communications.

As he has done with previous tech startups, Mills spotted a new playing field through continuous reading and research and created a roadmap for Conexus long before potential competitors saw the opportunity.

Since its founding, Conexus has installed more than 10,000 screens around the

world, Mills said.

In some cases, Conexus creates the advertising — the company has an in-house content and design department — and in other cases, it partners with clients' advertising agencies. Conexus streams content to the screens through its software in the cloud or through clients' software.

Managing rapid growth

Sharon Kerrick, assistant professor and associate director of the Forcht Center for Entrepreneurship at the University of Louisville, has watched many startups launch – some to great success and others to dismal decline. She said crystallizing and communicating goals is imperative to obtaining rapid growth and success.

“Paint a strong vision, and communicate that vision consistently,” Kerrick said. “Employees can help drive growth as long as they think they’re part of it. They will keep rowing in the same direction.”

Joe Brewer, director of finance at Conexus, agreed, saying, “Goals are communicated with every employee, no matter the position, to ensure everyone understands what is trying to be achieved.”

Conexus has hired eight employees in the last year for back office, support, project management and sales positions, bringing the total number of employees to 25, Brewer said. Mills said Conexus will continue to dramatically increase its work force.

“We’re adding 20 new people yet this year, most in Louisville,” Mills said. “We expect to buy some companies yet this year and move some functions to Louisville.”

In addition to Louisville, Conexus has offices in Geel, Belgium; Buenos Aires, Argentina; Dallas; New York City; and Los Angeles.

U of L’s Kerrick offered two key guidelines for managing employees during hyper growth similar to what Conexus is experiencing.

“Tell it like it is,” said Kerrick. “Bad news doesn’t get better with age.”

Kerrick said keeping employees informed shows confidence in their intellectual ability to solve problems quickly. “It calibrates people to tolerate the highs and lows because they’re used to talking about what’s good and bad.”

Brewer agreed. “Good communication is essential for our employees ... good communication assists us in retaining our customers,” he said.

Kerrick’s second guideline?

“Hire slowly, fire quickly,” Kerrick said. “It’s sage advice that someone told me a long time ago.”

Mills said it is important to identify professionals with specific skills that can handle the rapid workload, even if you have to look far and wide for candidates. “We continually look for the right people,” he said.

International reach

Conexus has grown so quickly that the Louisville office has quadrupled its space since 2010. The company started with 3,000 square feet at 13100 Magisterial Drive and soon expanded to 9,000 square feet.

Mills said Conexus took possession of 3,000 additional square feet in September, bringing the company’s current footprint to 12,000 square feet. The company also opened offices in Los Angeles and New York City in the last year, Brewer said.

Brewer said that because the digital signage field is an emerging market, it is challenging to find adequately trained technicians. As a perk, Conexus provides its employees with 100 percent company-paid health benefits. CEO Mills said he believes wholeheartedly in supporting his employees’ health and wellness.

Mills said he located Conexus in Louisville because that’s where he and his wife live and also because it’s an ideal location for logistics-based companies because of United Parcel Service Inc.’s Worldport air hub.

Mills' wife, Kathy Mills, also is a successful serial entrepreneur. She heads Louisville-based Strategic Communications LLC, a voice, data and video solutions company that ranked No. 25 in Business First's Fast 50 in 2013, ranked No. 41 in Inc. magazine's Inc. 500 in 2012 and has won many other awards.

Richard and Kathy Mills launched their first business venture — a computer store — in Louisville in 1980, sold it and went on to become increasingly successful technology entrepreneurs.

Mills' home is in Louisville, but Europe and the Pacific Rim are in his virtual backyard. From its office in Geel, Belgium, Conexus serves clients across Europe, China and Russia.

Conexus has installed screens in 25 to 30 locations in Japan, too, Mills said. His team converses in Dutch, Italian, Spanish, Flemish, French and English to serve its international customers.

When asked about the key to Conexus' rapid success, Mills answered: "It's really hard work. I've been traveling, calling on customers all over the world for five years."

About Conexus World Global LLC

CEO: Richard Mills

Founded locally: 2010

Employees: 25

Address: 13100 Magisterial Drive, Suite 100, Louisville, KY 40223

Phone: 502-791-8800

Website: conexusworld.com

Office locations

Buenos Aires, Argentina

Dallas

Geel, Belgium

Los Angeles

Louisville

New York City

Notable airport clients

Los Angeles International Airport

John F. Kennedy International Airport (New York City)

Reagan National Airport (Arlington, Va.)

Dulles International Airport (Dulles, Va.)

Hamad International Airport (Doha, Qatar)

Languages spoken by Conexus employees worldwide

Dutch

English

Flemish

French

Italian

Spanish

Notable clients

Chanel

Coach

Gap Inc.

H&M

Levi Strauss & Co.

Neiman Marcus

Sephora

To read more about all of the 2015 Fast 50 companies, [click here](#).