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Tuesday, June 10, 2008

**Local spotlight****Net tech retailer grows with converters, cables**

Novi-based Solid Signal expects to see its revenues top \$12M in 2008, nearly double '07.

Neal Haldane / Special to The Detroit News

**NOVI** -- The upcoming switch from analog to digital television has tuned Solid Signal into solid growth as the online electronics retailer sold 4,000 converter boxes in May and expects sales of up to 20,000 a month by February.

This surge in sales should propel Solid Signal's revenues north of \$12 million this year, up from \$7.15 million in 2007, according to founder Jerry Chapman.

"We're getting close to doubling this year and are in the process of hiring four to five more people," Chapman said.

Advertisement



Solid Signal moved into a new facility in Novi late last year where 20 employees take and process online and phone orders for antennas, satellite dishes, cables, global positioning satellite gear and thousands of other electronic products.

They just introduced their first line under the Solid Signal brand name, HDMI 1.3b (high-definition multimedia interface) cables.

Last year, Solid Signal attracted 200,000 monthly visits and racked up an average sales ticket of \$163 to earn position 493 on the 2008 Internet Retailer Top 500 Guide.

"SolidSignal.com is a great example of how the Internet makes niche retailing possible," said Kurt

Peters, editor in chief at Internet Retailer. "They serve a specialized market of customers across the country that would be very difficult to execute without the Web."

Chapman has been able to tap into demand for new tech products, find suppliers and then sell them to eager technology consumers and equipment installers.

After its founding in 2002, Solid Signal caught a wave of demand for cell phone repeaters and boosters that help resolve poor reception in buildings and homes. They partnered with Wireless Extenders, an Atlanta company that also debuted in 2002.

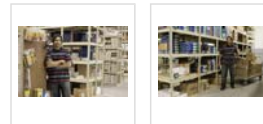
"We started selling our products in onesies and twosies to our friends and families and Solid Signal was one of our first business accounts," said Lee Bates, Wireless Extenders vice president of sales. "They're one of our top 10 customers and we've partnered with Jerry on many different specials."

Demand for cell phone boosters and repeaters remains strong, converter boxes are hot, and something new will become the next "it" product, Chapman said.

"Next year, it might be marine products, or something that saves electricity or water, not that I have found it yet," he said.



Solid Signal founder Jerry Chapman expects his Internet firm's revenues to be more than \$12 million this year, up from \$7.15 million in 2007. The Novi firm is 493 on the 2008 Internet Retailer Top 500 Guide. (Charles V. Tines / The Detroit News)

[click to view](#)**More information****Solid Signal**

Products: outdoor antennas, satellite TV equipment, cellular gear, consumer electronics  
 Founded: 2002  
 Headquarters: Novi  
 2007 sales: \$7.15 million  
 Employees: 20  
 Information: [www.solidsignal.com](http://www.solidsignal.com)

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But Chapman is not pinning all his hopes on finding the next hot product.

Before demand for converter boxes drops after digital TV goes live in February, Chapman plans to explore other channels.

One area involves fulfillment where his firm creates a Web presence for small manufacturers and handles their retail behind-the-scenes through Solid Signal.

"People like to buy direct from the manufacturer, but these companies don't want to ship one antenna out the door," Chapman said.

But Solid Signal specializes in handling single orders and can offer firms an effective retail operation without hiring Web designers and workers to fill orders, he said.

Solid Signal also has introduced its own branded line of products, starting with HDMI cables that carry digital audio and video signals from a high definition cable or satellite box to a television.

"We are going to focus on the Solid Signal brand," Chapman said. "People are responding to that now."

*Neal Haldane is a Metro Detroit freelance writer.*

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