Julio Cantera

Assist

“ "I saw an opportunity to become a leading software provider to small and medium-sized sales and distribution companies in Latin America." ”

COUNTRY	Uruguay
INDUSTRY	Technology
EMPLOYEES	85
YEAR SELECTED	2002
WEBSITE	www.assist.com.uy

COMPANY SNAPSHOT

Originally founded in 1988 by Julio Cantera and three partners, who Julio later bought out, Assist is a technology-based company that provides mobile software solutions to small and mid-sized businesses in the sales and distribution market.

Julio Cantera has immersed himself in the IT business world for the past 21 years. His love for technology and his tenacious personality have provided him with the flexibility to program almost any kind of software solution and have led him to customize software solutions informally and by working for a household appliance store in Montevideo since the age of 16. He received his education at night from a local private university and worked during the day to finance his own studies, eventually obtaining a degree in Systems Analysis in 1986. By 1988, he had purchased a 25% stake in a small software business owned by two college friends. To their efforts, he added not only an investment but also an overriding vision to create a powerful software house. He quickly proved to his partners that he was the man to lead Assist.

Assist achieved a technological turning point three years later when Los Sorchantes, a leading wholesale bread supplier in Uruguay, requested a sales and distribution software solution. Los Sorchantes managers feared their salesmen were wasting time and leaving the point of sale poorly attended, and they wanted to track them during their distribution routes. In response, Julio came up with the idea for “Power Street”, a mobile distribution software system capable of being installed inside salesmen’s vans and allowing headquarters to oversee salesmen and process information remotely on a real-time basis. When Julio’s product led Los Sorchantes to optimal results, Julio saw that his company had a bright future servicing all kinds of distribution companies. Power Street’s overnight success caused Assist to increase its client portfolio rapidly as word of mouth attracted many distributing companies who sought to optimize their distribution systems.

By the end of 1991, however, the rapidity at which Assist was growing taxed the company’s inadequate managerial infrastructure, and the company suffered a growth crisis. Julio made a characteristically proactive move by seeking out help and found it by enrolling in a United Nations-sponsored program, Empretec, a year-long business training program for small and mid-sized executives in Uruguay. As part of the same effort, Julio and 200 other entrepreneurs founded,UCRE (Uruguayan Business Creators), a non-profit organization that created a forum of discussion for entrepreneurs to learn from one another’s successful and unsuccessful endeavors.

By 1998, Assist had closed its largest client deal and obtained other large contracts that allowed it to secure its leadership position in Uruguay. Assist has achieved a major feat by adapting to the demands of the Uruguayan market, where companies have very limited resources yet demand the highest level of products and services.

ENDEAVOR AND ASSIST

With Endeavor’s support, Julio closed an important partnership, and expanded agressively in Latin America. When opening his Mexico office, he received numerous commercial contacts from Endeavor Mexico. Through two rounds of the G-Lab program, he gained recommendations of potential partners as well as expansion guidance. Local mentors, meanwhile, assisted in creating a business model, facilitated access to key players in the distributions market, and helped improve corporate communications. Julio also participated in an Entrepreneur Summit.

Julio has demonstrated commitment by nominating multiple entrepreneurs for Endeavor’s selection process.