NOW HIRING

They're into strong markets and they know exactly what they're doing. They're smart, they're hiring and they're poised to grow in the new year.

In an ideal economy, the majority of Oregon's businesses would fit such a description. Not today. The Great Recession has upended the strong as well as the weak, forcing some of the state's top performers to resort to cutbacks, mass layoffs and even bankruptcy.

But not every business has narrowed its focus to simply cutting costs in order to survive. Some savvy companies are embracing the impending arrival of 2010 with powerful optimism. In the free verse of Ziba Design president Sohrab Vossoughi, it's a matter of planets lining up. In the technical jargon of TriQuint CEO Ralph Quinsey, it comes down to the inevitable progression from 3G to 4G to 5G and beyond.

Of course, it's easy for those two guys to wax positive, with their fortuitous connections to a California company named after a piece of fruit. But other Oregon business leaders have equally compelling reasons to gloat. They caught their respective trends early and tapped into growing markets with huge potential, and they're gobbling up market share.

The forecast for the state's economy may call for sluggish recovery with frequent setbacks, but the outlook for smart phones, user experience design, healthy local foods, data archives, renewable energy and health care innovation is far from gloomy. Well-run companies filling these and other niches are the state's best hope to create the sorts of jobs that will lead to recovery.

BY BEN JACKLET

Ziba Design founder Sohrab Vossoughi (pictured here at the Chinese Design Now exhibit at the Portland Art Museum) delved into user experience design and Chinese consumer research early. As a result his company is positioned to grow.

PHOTO BY LEAH NASH

TriQuint Semiconductor

Niche: radio frequency technology **Oregon jobs:** 800

It would be difficult to find two Oregon executives more dissimilar in demeanor than Ziba's Sohrab Vossoughi and Ralph Quinsey, the soft-spoken CEO of TriQuint Semiconductor. While Vosoughi clearly delights in following his muse wherever it may lead him, Quinsey is as disciplined and technical in his approach to being interviewed as he is in running a growing technology company.

Hillsboro-based TriQuint spun off from Tektronix in 1985 and rode the technology wave of the 1990s until that wave crashed at the turn of the century. When Quinsey took over in 2002 the company was teetering on the edge of irrelevancy. It had missed out on a major technological advance in its radio frequency business (the shift from components to modules) and needed to make a fast transition or get left behind.

"Filters were a big part of our business, and when Qualcomm completed their conversion to a direct conversion radio, they completely eliminated that market," says Quinsey. "We were staring at a declining pipeline of new opportunities."

Rather than radically shrinking the company, Quinsey and TriQuint focused on embracing the new technology and finding new applications in military and commercial markets. In 2002, new products made up only about 17% of TriQuint's revenue. Today that figure is more than 50%. In spite of a recent drop in its stock price due to missing Wall Street's quarterly expectations, TriQuint has recovered powerfully over the long term and remained profitable throughout the worst of the recession, adding more than 100 jobs in Hillsboro during 2008 and recruiting for several dozen positions going into 2009.

The key to that counter-cyclical success has been twofold. First, TriQuint has landed a steady string of defense contracts to assist the military with communications and surveillance, most recently winning a $16.2 million defense contract as part of its Nitride Electronic Next-Generation Technology (NEXT) program. Second, the market for smart phones has exploded, and while Quinsey won't discuss his company's collaboration with Apple on the iPhone, he is quick to praise the visionary product that has changed the industry.

But not even the iPhone can guarantee TriQuint an easy path. After third-quarter profits failed to meet analysts' expectations and Quinsey lowered his outlook for the fourth quarter, TriQuint's stock fell sharply in October. Quinsey says the business re-

TriQuint CEO Ralph Quinsey (far left) added 100 jobs in Hillsboro in 2008 and expects continued growth due to a steady string of military contracts and booming demand for smart phones.

PHOTOS BY LEAH NASH

mains cash strong and in a solid strategic position. "Our military business is a technology incubator for us," he says. "We get direct investment from the military to do fundamental R&D. It may take five, 10 or 15 years for those technologies to develop into products, but there will always be a next generation of products."

That also applies to the booming civilian market for wireless communication: "It was always a joke in the industry that 3G was just around the corner for 20 years," says Quinsey. "Well, it's finally here in a big way. Eventually there will be a 5G and a 6G. And we're going to be a part of it."

Putting his money where his mouth is, Quinsey responded to the drop in TriQuint's stock price by purchasing 3,500 shares on Oct. 23.

HemCon

Niche: advanced wound care
Oregon employees: 80

Few will deny the value of a technology that saves the lives of severely wounded American soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq. But while HemCon began as a collaboration with the U.S. military in 2001, CEO John Morgan expects to earn more through commercial markets than defense contracts for the first time in 2010.

That's because HemCon's proprietary technology, which capitalizes on the healing and anti-bacterial properties of a biopolymer refined from shrimp shells, has a broad variety of potential uses in hospitals and research centers as well as on the battlefield. "Virtually all of the products that we develop in conjunction with the military are geared to have a commercial application as well," says Morgan. Examples range from HemCon bandages, patches and dental dressings, to phase one clinical trials funded by the military to develop a freeze-dried plasma product and delivery system for resuscitating severely injured soldiers and civilian trauma patients.

HemCon's potential derives from chitosan, which has hemostatic and antimicrobial properties and is both biodegradable and bioabsorbable. HemCon dental dressings do not need to be removed after surgery, for example, because they simply dissolve in saliva over the course of several days. HemCon patches not only control bleeding during invasive clinical procedures, they also protect the patient from microorganisms.

HemCon's success so far has come from proving itself on the battleground, essentially replacing the battlefield tourniquet with an easily applied bandage guaranteed to stop the bleeding. Its products have received wide credit for saving lives overseas, and the Army named the HemCon bandage one of the "top 10 greatest inventions" of 2005. But the next stage of development for the company brings a whole new challenge. Building HemCon from a military contractor with a few commercial products into a thriving biotech business will require new expertise. Morgan says the company plans to bolster its sales and marketing staff to capitalize on its entry into commercial markets.

Oregon's biotech cluster will never be mistaken for California's or Massachusetts', but it does have potential. Several young companies such as Agere Pharmaceutical (one of a half dozen spin-offs from Bend Research), DesignMedix and Vesticon have compelling upsides, and while Genentech's Hillsboro property is more of a warehouse than a research facility presently, the San Francisco biotech powerhouse has room to expand in Oregon should it decide to.

Morgan says he is always looking for "highly educated and motivated" researchers to add to its R&D team in Portland. And while he won't share average salary figures, he does note that medical research positions pay 30% higher than the average Oregon job.