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The Daks Takeaway: When sticking to your knitting becomes a risk

By Martin C. Daks
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When **Carlos Pinzon** launched an information technology staffing and services firm in 1992, he and his partners looked for clients in the business segments they knew best — finance and insurance. It's the kind of advice that most entrepreneurs get: start with what you know.

"My business partners and I were employed by a computer consulting firm, and we knew finance and insurance," he told me. "So we went with our strengths."

But thanks to the recession, finance is in the pits right now, and insurance isn't exactly a hot spot for growth.

So I asked Pinzon, president of **SynergisticIT**, located in the Iselin section of Woodbridge, if he thinks it might have been better to branch out to more industries.

"You spend a lot of time becoming an expert in a segment," he said. "We're a boutique firm, so we stay focused on a couple of them, and that's where we build our reputation."

Pinzon quit a consulting firm to help launch a startup, but not until he had a big client lined up. He knows a narrow focus makes him more vulnerable in a downturn like this.

"We've leveraged our knowledge to adjacent verticals," he said, lapsing into techno-speak. "For example, while we're still focused on financial consulting, we're doing more government financial consulting work." SynergisticIT is also shifting focus to concentrate on high-level IT staffing.

Instead of providing programmers and other plain-vanilla technicians, "which you can get from a ton of staffing and consulting companies," Pinzon's looking to place people like project managers, system architects and information security officers, who require a bit more time to identify and cultivate.

I asked him if he was always a risk-taker, and Pinzon replied, "Well, I grew up on 99th Street in the projects in East Harlem."

I got the message.

I've seen folks like Pinzon in other industries. When they're growing up they're not consciously thinking about risk-reward, because risk taking was simply part of growing up.

The takeaway: Don't run from risk, but try to stack at least a few cards in your favor.

Martin C. Daks is a longtime NJBIZ staff reporter and former accountant who focuses on accounting, banking, finance, insurance and law. To contact him regarding his biweekly column, e-mail mdaks@njbiz.com.

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