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Ricardo Ortizcazarín's first bet paid off, so he made more WEB DESIGNER STARTED FIRM WITH AN 'OR ELSE' CLAUSE; NOW IS PAID ON PERFORMANCE

SIMONE CAZARES
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For Ricardo Ortizcazarín, the key to running a successful business isn't about making money. It's about building strong relationships that in turn produce results.

Originally from Mexico, Ortizcazarín came to the United States as a foreign-exchange student in high school. After falling in love with Minnesota, he returned the following year to study at the University of Minnesota.

When he graduated from college, Ortizcazarín worked for a variety of companies and moved up through the ranks to become a programming director at Venturian Software in Hopkins. Although Ortizcazarín made more money as a director than at a previous job at retailer Egghead Software, he wasn't happy. He felt like his voice didn't matter to the company and he missed the tight-knit relationships he had formed with colleagues at his previous employer. He decided it was time to make a change.

He launched Cazarín Interactive in his basement, which he calls the Bat Cave. With only \$20,000 to begin with, he and his wife made a deal: If he wanted to continue building the company, he would have to make \$100,000 in sales from the day the company was founded to the end of the year. If he failed, he would look for another job.

Cazarín made his goal and now, as a web-design and digital-marketing agency, the company is still going strong. That's because he believes in treating clients right. He strives to build strong relationships with the companies he works for and makes sure they're successful. It's so important to him that instead of having clients pay him a lump sum, he's paid on performance – measured by metrics he and the client set up early in the relationship.

"If we aren't doing our job correctly, we don't make as much money," he said, "It's a win-win situation."

Patrick Gaughan, president and CEO of Gaughan Cos., is one of Cazarín's clients. He said Ortizcazarín's policies are what makes Cazarín different from other digital marketing companies.



NANCY KUEHN | MSPBJ

Ricardo Ortizcazarín runs his web-design and marketing agency with a focus on company culture and a billing approach that keeps the firm accountable to clients.

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CAZARIN INTERACTIVE WEB DESIGN

Business: Web design and digital marketing agency

Owner and president: Ricardo Ortizcazarín

Founded: 1998

Employees: 20

Revenue: \$3 million

Cazarín created a website for Gaughan Cos. that allows its tenants to make requests for services and pay online. Cazarín also provides social media services for Gaughan's companies.

Gaughan is a believer in the pay-as-you-go method, and both he and Ortizcazarín believe the agreement keeps Cazarín accountable for its work. Working with Cazarín has worked out so well for Gaughan that he's now using

the company for some side projects.

Even though building his business is important to Ortizcazarín. He also cares about his employees and wants to make sure their voices are heard.

Ortizcazarín is cautious about taking on new clients and wants to make sure they're a good fit for his company. He expects them to be respectful to his employees and isn't afraid to drop a client if they aren't.

"The environment is so important," he said, "Two years ago we used to do anything for anyone who had a check."

Even though he owns the company, he said he doesn't have the right to hire a new employee right away. The candidate has to interview with the entire company. If every employee doesn't agree on whether the person should be hired, it doesn't happen.

"My staff knows that I care about their opinions. The process makes sure their personalities jibe quite well."

For Ortizcazarín a good life isn't measured by the amount of money he makes, but by the way he lives his life and the relationships he forms along the way. And he's determined to do what he believes is right.