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SB firm maps continued growth with transit customers

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Three U.S. transit agencies are getting on board with a Santa Barbara company that provides maps for passengers to get around more easily on bus, light-rail train and subway systems.

Thanks to recent sales to agencies in Los Angeles, Redondo Beach and Spokane, Wash., the small company is looking to increase hiring by 20 percent — especially graphic designers and cartographers with public transit experience — to keep up with the workflow, according to company president Rick Wood, president and CEO of CHK America.

In most of the deals, it's a case of return business.

On Monday, the company announced it has been awarded design projects with Beach Cities Transit in Redondo Beach, LA Metro and the Spokane Transit Authority. Design projects for these agencies include the enhancement of customer information and wayfinding products, giving riders more confidence in using public transportation, according to Mr. Wood. Combined with contracts announced late last year for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, Fort Worth's new Enhanced Bus Corridor Line, the Regional Transit Authority in New Orleans and Hampton Roads Transit in Virginia, Mr. Wood estimates that year-to-date revenue is up by 50 percent.

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He declined to break down the dollar volume for each specific project, citing the competitive landscape in securing contracts.

This is the third time CHK America has been selected by LA Metro to create customer information solutions for the agency.

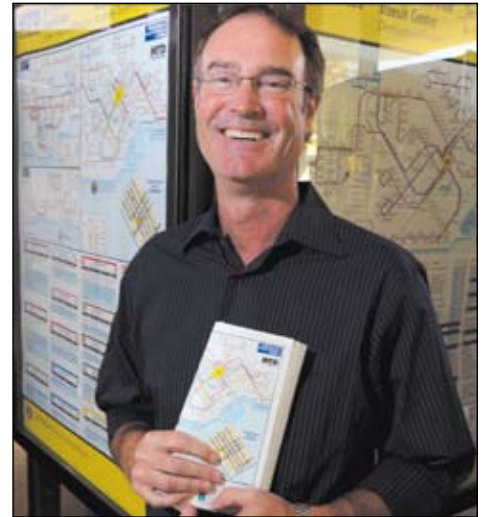
"We are proud to have been selected again to assist in their continued efforts of producing top quality, compelling customer information," Mr. Wood said.

CHK also will design stop-specific wayfinding display panels for 125 of Spokane Transit Authority's busiest sheltered bus stops. This is the third time the company has been selected to create customer information solutions for the agency.

"In collaboration with our team, CHK created a system map design that dramatically improves the readability and understanding of the system for customers," said Spokane Transit Agency chief executive officer E. Susan Meyer in a statement. "We are thrilled to work with them again on this project which extends those principles to our busiest bus stops."

With gas hikes and environmental concerns on many people's minds, transit agencies have seen a dramatic increase in ridership the past few years. That trend should bode well for the South Coast firm, said Mr. Wood.

In addition to Santa Barbara's Metropolitan Transit District, the company has provided customer wayfinding information for transit systems in



STEVE MALONE/NEWS-PRESS FILE

Rick Wood, shown at the Transit Center in downtown Santa Barbara, runs a local company that helps millions of U.S. transit riders figure out how to get around. The firm recently inked major contracts with three U.S. transit agencies.

Ventura, Santa Monica, Pasadena, San Diego and Monterey-Salinas.

Helping transit customers get from Points A to B with rider-friendly maps has been the focus of CHK America, a division of a U.K.-headquartered company (the CHK stands for Cook, Hammond and Kell), since it was established in Santa Barbara in 1999.

Whenever CHK's boss visits a new city, he frequently hops a bus, subway or light-rail train in order to get around and also size up the competition.

More often than not, the color-coded passenger information maps along the way are the handiwork of some of the planners, designers and cartographers of the Santa Barbara-based business which he leads.

According to Mr. Wood, CHK America now reaches 20 percent of the public transportation customers in the U.S.

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