



INVOICE ME

"We were out there aggressively pitching our product; assertively telling people what is unique about our solution, why it's important and why they should try it. You catch a lot of latent competitors off guard when you're going all guns a blazing, like a start-up should be, to get your message out. Especially when the other guys are taking a more measured approach...I'll pick that fight every time."

- Will Andrews, CEO

THE ENTREPRENEUR

It was early 2007 when Will Andrews decided to leave Microsoft to attend The University of Chicago Booth School of Business. He enjoyed his job managing 22 engineers in Microsoft's Windows Mobile Group, where they brought game-quality graphics, interactive media, and camera capture to Microsoft's mobile platforms. However, Will yearned for more. His dream was to run a company one day and to do that, he knew he needed to be exposed to all facets of a business. He decided business school was the best next step.

Like many "first years," Will arrived at business school with the notion he would land a position at a Fortune 100 company, with Google topping his list. But around the time recruiters began courting Will and his classmates, an alternate path presented itself. With all of the resources and excitement around entrepreneurship at Chicago Booth, Will realized he could follow his dream of running a company sooner than he had originally thought.

ENTREPRENEUR'S CORNER

Deciding to take the plunge into entrepreneurship was even more challenging than deciding to leave Microsoft to attend business school. First and foremost, he wasn't making the decision alone. Will had to take into account the interests of his wife, Clara, and their future family. He thought about how he had already given up his six-figure salary to attend business school and watched as his classmates secured high paying internships. Despite the potential risk, he couldn't bear the thought of passing up an opportunity to pursue his dream. The decision was heart wrenching but in the end, he decided entrepreneurship was for him.

INVOICEME INCEPTION

As Will thought about how to get started, he sat down with a friend who also wanted to participate in the New Venture Challenge (NVC), a coveted business plan competition for Chicago Booth students. Over the next five weeks, they gathered 40 potential business ideas in an Excel spreadsheet.

Then, Will and his partner narrowed their list to five ideas by asking themselves five key questions: Do we have enough time to build the product? Is this the right team to execute on this idea? Is obtaining the required capital feasible? Do we believe in this idea? Can we pursue this idea whole-heartedly?

With only five ideas remaining, Will began thinking like a marketer. “If I was going to succeed, I needed to launch a company in a market where customers had a willingness to pay.” Will’s partner hated the amount of time invoice management took away from activities that really mattered at his previous company. From that insight, InvoiceMe was born. Will created the new firm to reduce the time professionals spent manually entering invoice information. He was going to build and release the first mobile solution for scanning invoices via smartphone camera and submitting customer orders without typing.

NEW VENTURE CHALLENGES

The following months flew by. Will and his team used every resource available to design the best product possible. By leveraging their business school network, they were able to interview over 20 CFOs to better understand typical invoice management processes and to gauge concept interest. They were elated when their feasibility summary was accepted into the business plan competition.

Will went to his first coaching session confident. The design for InvoiceMe was an architectural masterpiece. Expecting praise and positive reinforcement for his hard work, Will was blindsided when one of his professor’s reaction was, “I’m sorry, but are we in an engineering strategy session?” Having never performed a marketing function, Will had not realized the importance of simple, clear messaging. Taking his coach’s feedback to heart, Will led his team to a 5th place finish, with an opportunity to present to well-known angel investment group. With new confidence, Will felt he was close to launching a successful business.

THE TEAM DISSOLVES

As soon as the team crossed the finish line, all of Will’s teammates went on their way to their investment banking and wealth management internships. In less than a week, InvoiceMe became a lonesome, one-man company running out of his business school’s incubator with no product and no customers. So, Will did what came naturally to him: he sat in his tiny cubicle, day after day, cranking out InvoiceMe beta software code for the Windows Mobile platform.

It was not until January 2009, a year after starting InvoiceMe, when Will was able to release the InvoiceMe beta for Windows Mobile. With a product in hand, Will was hungry to find anyone willing to sign up. He had no problem driving a hundred miles for a fifteen minute meeting with one of his advisors’¹ contacts. Time after time, he would pitch his product, always getting the same response, “I would love to try your product,

¹ During the New Venture Challenge and the months that followed, Will had built an advisory board of eight individuals with relevant knowledge and contacts

but unfortunately, no one at our company uses Windows Mobile.” Slowly but surely, the conversations chipped away at Will’s confidence, until he was forced to reassess his situation.

During the short time since he had started developing InvoiceMe, Windows Mobile market share had dropped from 25% to 13%. After months of trying, the largest company he found running exclusively Windows Mobile had three employees. After over a year of work, Will came to the realization he had built the right product for the wrong platform. He could not qualify customers because qualified customers did not exist.

COURSE CORRECTION

By early January 2009, Will Andrews could no longer ignore his mistake. But by mid-January, he was done lamenting. He needed to build InvoiceMe for another platform and he needed to do it quickly. One of Will’s closest friends from 6th grade, Mike Gardener, had relevant experience in the mobile space and was in a period of career transition. Mike cautiously agreed to join InvoiceMe in order to bring a Blackberry version of the application to market. Will knew Mike’s decision to join the team had a lot to do with their long-term friendship. He was lucky.

Some may have questioned Will’s decision to prioritize Blackberry over other platforms, especially given Blackberry’s plummeting market share. However, Blackberry was attractive for several reasons. First, it held 45% of the smartphone market. Second, there were less than 800 applications available. Nine out of ten developers were working on iPhone, leaving Blackberry neglected. Finally, Blackberry had a disproportionate share of business professionals, including InvoiceMe’s target segment of “on-the-go” professionals.

The moment Mike agreed to join, InvoiceMe began a dead sprint to get the Blackberry version to market. Mike started development on February 1st, 2009. By the beginning of April, they had a good enough version to demo. By the beginning of May, their free beta version was up and running.

BLOGGERS

In the entrepreneurial world, linear growth is a certain death. In April 2009, Will believed InvoiceMe could easily obtain 300 registered users² by July, so he told his team³ to sign-up 500.

Like most start-ups with no paying customers, InvoiceMe had no formal PR budget, which meant no money to buy ads and no money to pay a traditional PR firm. By necessity, InvoiceMe pulled on their bootstraps by making friends with as many bloggers as possible. After brainstorming a list of twenty high-tech and smartphone blogs, each team member took responsibility for 5-10 bloggers. Their mission was to make friends with each of the twenty bloggers and any major contributors.

InvoiceMe team members scoured the message boards constantly, looking for opportunities to add insightful comments with the hope of being noticed and liked by the bloggers. They sent frequent emails trying to get onto the bloggers’ radar. The 1st or 2nd email attempt typically failed, but persistence and research paid off. By having the right subject line, news article, or referral, the probability of a response increased significantly. Almost universally, once a blogger featured InvoiceMe, it was easy to get coverage a second time.

² A registered user is a customer who has downloaded the application and has provided a valid email address

³ The team consisted of Will Andrews, Mike Gardener, three engineering interns and an MBA intern from Chicago Booth

As of June 21st, they had not reached their target 500 registered users but the goal was within reach. On June 22nd, Forbes published an article about InvoiceMe, and by their July 1st deadline, registered users soared to 604. A month later, with downloads-per-day continuing to accelerate, Mike made an accidental discovery: InvoiceMe had become the top invoice application on Blackberry.

ENTREPRENEUR'S CORNER

On July 1st, 2009, Will gathered the team to share the good news. At well-established companies, this kind of success would typically be recognized with a financial reward. At InvoiceMe, no one cared about a monetary reward or some plaque to hang on the wall. Everyone had the start-up mentality and knew how crucial it was to prove they had a viable business. Achieving the goal *was* the reward.

HONING IN ON THE TARGET

By September 2009, a month after achieving their first major goal, InvoiceMe realized registered users increased dramatically after a favorable post from a blogger covering business applications for smartphones. The post was informally syndicated by other blogs that rely on each other for story leads. The vast majority of these blogs were Blackberry blogs. They knew many Blackberry users were business people, but it took until this point to realize Blackberry blogs would be read by the right eyeballs.

Instead of continuing to cast a wide net, InvoiceMe made Blackberry bloggers a priority. They aggressively promoted their product, explaining why they were the best application for invoices, what made it unique and why it was important to try it.

That year, Blackberry selected and promoted the top new applications of the year. Companies submitted their applications for selection and BlackBerry chose 16 to highlight at their annual conference. Each selected application was given a full week as the “featured” Blackberry app on what the company calls its “Carousel”.

Given their new focus, InvoiceMe applied to be one of the top Blackberry Applications in September 2009. On October 1st, they were selected as one of the month's top apps and were featured for a week, free of

ENTREPRENEUR'S CORNER

“When we were in the Blackberry Top Apps of 2009 contest, we were invited to their conference in November to present. We were also able to go to a lot of sessions and mingle with various parties at Blackberry.

We walked by a room in the conference that was staffed by Blackberry people and was open for technical discussions. We happened upon THE guy who was in charge of approving or denying new apps for the Blackberry App Store. His name was Jason. When we talked to him, we mentioned how terrific it was for us to have spent the week on the Carousel. We thanked him and told him how much we appreciated him selecting us. He casually mentioned to us that the people who make the selections for the carousel end up using the same apps over and over again. He said, ‘I’m tired of using the same apps. Why don’t you e-mail me sometime and I’ll see if I can get you on the Carousel again.’ I could shoot Jason a note today and he would reply in 10 minutes, because of the connection we made and the loyalty we’ve shown to the BlackBerry platform. You can’t build that kind of connection hiding behind Gmail. “

charge.

ENTREPRENEUR'S CORNER

"We were the best at invoice reading; we were the only ones doing it. But to broadly say we were the best mobile invoice management app? That would be highly debatable. There were companies that had been working on their apps for a long time. They may not have had invoice reading, but they certainly had several features necessary to the invoice management process that we did not have. So were we the best "mobile invoice management app?" Probably not. However, we were out there aggressively pitching our product; assertively telling people what is unique about our solution, why it's important and why they should try it. You catch a lot of latent competitors off guard when you're going all guns a blazing, like a start-up should be, to get your message out. Especially when the other guys are taking a more measured approach...I'll pick that fight every time."

A TIME TO CHARGE

Being featured on the Blackberry Carousel was equivalent to receiving a formal Blackberry endorsement. InvoiceMe downloads jumped well above 5,000 per day. Comparing that number to the target 500 registered users from three months earlier, the download statistics resembled the infamous "hockey stick".

With thousands of new users signing up every day, and positive feedback that the product and service were useful, Will knew InvoiceMe had been given a unique opportunity. It was a perfect time to start charging for their product. On Wednesday of "Carousel Week", they started treating users who had scanned in 40 or more invoices per month differently. InvoiceMe sent the customer an email informing them they had reached the free trial limit and gave them a link to the InvoiceMe subscription payment page.

ENTREPRENEUR'S CORNER

Will knew he had less than a few days to test pricing before registrations would slow. In a perfect world, InvoiceMe would have built a payment tab into the application itself to optimize the user experience, but a new version of the application would take far too long.

Instead, Will and his team thought on their feet. They decided to manually send an email to any customer who had reached a reasonable usage limit. They quickly set up a landing page with nothing but a Google check-out button and pricing information. As soon as a customer paid, they could turn service back on.

The payment request emails started going out at 10:00AM on Wednesday, October 7th 2009. At 10:03AM, InvoiceMe's phone rang. A miffed customer was on the other end of the line. "I can't believe you are charging for your app. The app description didn't say anything about being a charged app."

When Will decided to turn on a pay wall for InvoiceMe, he knew he would get a backlash. The concept of an ongoing subscription fee was unusual in the mobile app space; almost all existing apps used a one-time, upfront payment, or were entirely free. Customers were used to the traditional software model, and they

enjoyed what they are used to. To many would-be customers, the idea of ongoing subscription fees just sounded like too much of a commitment. However, InvoiceMe believed that the SaaS (Software as a Service) model, where customers pay for a product-service combination on an ongoing basis, was worth the initial backlash, because it best represented the ongoing value provided by the solution as the customer used it for many years to come. The InvoiceMe team talked internally about how they'd "dare" any competitor to provide the same ongoing value on anything other than a SaaS revenue model; Will felt that some competitors would eventually try to match their value proposition on a one-time-pay revenue model, but that they would fail financially.

It would have been significantly easier for Will to estimate the lifetime costs of a customer, add a percentage margin, and follow the status quo by charging an upfront fee. However, Will knew this was not a sustainable business model. With the 99¢ download, the app developer gets a huge spike in upfront revenue. As a result, the developer is incentivized to bring in as many new customers as possible, and has no incentive to keep existing customers happy. However, it is considerably less expensive to keep existing customers satisfied than to continuously bring on new customers. With an on-going subscription fee, Will knew he would be able to grow at a modest rate while keeping existing customers happy.

InvoiceMe had multiple customers call in and ask, "Can I just pay \$40 upfront for a lifetime membership?" Recalling the logic above, Will made no exceptions; customers pay the subscription fee or they do not get to use the service. It was painful to say no to \$40 when their bank account was empty, but Will knew he was making the right long term decision for his company and customers.

UNSOLICITED LOVE

Will Andrews was in his office at 9:00AM on the morning of October 23rd, 2009 when the phone rang. He answered. "Hi, I'm from BusinessWeek and I am writing an article for November's issue. We're featuring the top 5 business apps for smartphones. I have a quick turnaround time. Do you think you could send your logo and a screenshot over in the next couple of hours?"

Will could feel his heart pounding in his chest. When talking about that phone call years later, he said, "That moment was so precious. When you dream up an idea, build it and start getting unsolicited love for what you do, that is when being an entrepreneur is really meaningful."

With their Blackberry endorsement, Forbes and BusinessWeek articles, 100K app downloads, and 25K registered users, Will believed InvoiceMe finally had enough credibility to solicit more paying customers.

ENTREPRENEUR'S CORNER

When Will talked to potential customers, he would often start the conversation with, "Did you hear about us through that BusinessWeek article?" Most times they didn't, but mentioning the article gave InvoiceMe an additional level of credibility.

RECOMMITTING TO SALES

ENTREPRENEUR'S CORNER

"I was interviewing to be in the CAP 20 program at the Chicagoland Entrepreneurial Center. This was about January 17th of 2010. I go through our whole Whiz-Bang presentation with videos and everything. The people in the room were about as excited as they could be about invoice management. One of Chicago's best-known Venture Capitalists is across the table from me and stares at me straight on and says, "That sounds interesting but how many paying customers do you really have?" And the answer on that day was 14. I couldn't escape the question. It was a direct question in a small group. That hurt. In not so many words he told me to get my butt in line and start worrying about sales, not engineering. MBAs are great at dancing around a question, but this was a time I was truly put on the spot and the only option was to answer directly."

Right around the time of the BusinessWeek article, InvoiceMe launched their official pricing. They did an experiment to estimate the optimal pricing levels. Urgency was incorporated by clearly displaying a price that expired in two days (perhaps the price would go up after that). A/B tests, where visitors were presented with one of two versions of the pricing scheme, helped InvoiceMe figure out which pricing scheme maximized profit (Marginal Profit x Quantity).

In February, with pricing experiments complete and the resulting schema in place, an additional 25 paying customers signed up for InvoiceMe. In March, the number was closer to 50. Then, in April, they reached out to their friends at Blackberry for some help. To this point, Will had stayed in close contact with Blackberry. They frequently sent notes updating them on what was new at InvoiceMe, what they were up to and the status of the app version for new Blackberry models. Will requested that they be featured on the Carousel again and because of his relationship with those responsible for selecting Carousel apps, his request was granted. They brought in 172 paying customers in April of 2010, which got them significantly closer to their goal.

ENTREPRENEUR'S CORNER

"The fourth week of April 2010, I spent a week in Singapore for an Entrepreneurial Symposium. The trip had been booked for 6 months and was being paid for by the University of Chicago. I didn't know exactly when Blackberry was going to put us on the Carousel, but as it turned out, we were featured the exact same week I was in Singapore.

InvoiceMe was getting dumped with new users and our data entry workers were overloaded for the only time ever. This was not a culture where you just skip out of some meetings because you are busy. I literally got back from events at 10PM after a full day of sessions and I logged in and spent 7 hours straight entering data for incoming invoices. You know you are an entrepreneur when you are the CEO and have to give up a week of sleep for data entry."

COMMITTING TO CONVERSION

The goal for summer 2010 was different from 2009 because InvoiceMe knew they were reaching the right eyeballs: Blackberry-owning road warriors, traveling the country. The challenge was how to get people who are already checking out the product to make a purchase. In other words, InvoiceMe needed to improve their conversion rate.

February through the summer of 2010, InvoiceMe became very rigorous about tracking their downloads, trial registrations and subscriptions. They committed to improving the resulting ratios every month and they did. “If you have a lot of people coming into the top of the funnel, and you can keep getting a bit better every month at improving those conversion ratios, then you are on the way to the promised land. It might take some time, but you are on the way.”

The actions they took to improve conversion rates were not complicated. They looked at the data to see where customers were leaving the funnel and experimented with ways to make the process easier. Auto-filling email addresses, removing unnecessary fields on sign-up forms, cleaning the page to make it look less intimidating were all steps they took to encourage customers to make it through the funnel. They just kept asking themselves, “What can we do to make it easier?”

ENTREPRENEUR’S CORNER

“You can knock off some double digit wins in conversion rates by paying attention and committing to make it a little better every month.”

Being detail oriented and data focused had additional benefits. When investors asked why conversion rates went up or down by half a percent in a given month, Will was always able to give them an answer. This built a level of trust and credibility with investors, encouraging them to stick around for the long haul.

SCALING

InvoiceMe met their target of 500 paying customers by July 2010. At that point, the top of the funnel was flowing well, with sufficient new users looking at their app every month. They had now also gotten fairly scientific and rigorous about converting customers post-download. It was time to start thinking about how to turn one and two person wins into entire company wins. Will set the next annual goal to 2500 paying customers by July 2011.

InvoiceMe got smarter about pre-filling a suggested username on the in-app registration form. Previously, the company had simply pre-filled whatever email address they could detect from the user’s phone. However, that left InvoiceMe with many email addresses that ended in @gmail.com, @yahoo.com, @hotmail.com, which told them exactly nothing about the individual. The team realized by changing their email-detection scheme, they could first look for email addresses that weren’t from the well-known free webmail services, and by doing so they would likely end up with the user’s work email address. By pre-filling the username⁴ field in this manner, it became easier to tell when a new customer was registering from a company that already had other customers. InvoiceMe could then put together a ten or fifteen-seat package for the broader company, and know for certain there were already cheerleaders within the company.

⁴ Users could ignore the pre-filled email address and type in any username they wanted, but the model user would accept the auto-suggested pre-filled username

ENTREPRENEUR'S CORNER

"At the time, we just prepopulated whatever e-mail we could find on their device, but sometimes they had multiple e-mails. Pre-populating one of them used to be good enough. One morning over coffee, we asked ourselves, 'What if we look at the e-mails they have pre-populated on their device and we prefer anything other than Gmail, Hotmail or Yahoo?' In a lot of cases, we could get their company name. Suddenly we knew when three people from the same company had signed up for the service. At that point, we could reach out to one of them, and ask if there is anything we can do for their company."

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CUSTOMER

Sara Staples, a rising second year at Chicago Booth, was tasked with determining how to take InvoiceMe from one-off individual sales to scalable B2B sales. She needed to answer the questions: what size of company should InvoiceMe go after and how should they approach these companies?

There was no easy way to answer either of these questions; Sara had to talk to decision makers in companies of all sizes. In order to reach the decision makers, Sara started with registered users with domain names that signaled a reasonably achievable sales target, starting with professional services firms, because as a segment they are heavy users of invoice management software. She would call the registered user, leading off the conversation with a customer-satisfaction check, and gathering any feedback or questions. Having established credibility, she moved on to impact questions about how the company overall handled invoice management, and what other people in the company we might be able to help. Finally, she would strive to gather information that would be needed to close a company-wide sale: information about the decision-making process, and the decision makers.

With each call, Sara had no idea what she would get. Some turned out to be entry-level employees, some were C-suite decision makers, and some were in between. On the surface, it seemed these calls were poorly qualified. However, she did know they had the right phone and a big enough problem to self-identify by searching for and downloading the application.

CUSTOMER REDEFINITION

Sara's first discovery was the decision-maker for company-wide implementations was the CFO. CFOs were typically intrigued by the product, but the first question was always "how am I going to get to the data on the backend?" It wasn't that the CFOs didn't care about the satisfaction of their employees. They simply had too many issues to worry about to consider the specifics of how an application made the employees' job easier.

Unfortunately, the benefits InvoiceMe had highlighted and implemented to this point had centered on making the employee's job easier, not the CFO's. InvoiceMe had spent nearly no time thinking about how to collect data and integrate it with existing systems. As a result, they were not in a great place to immediately move forward with a new value proposition for a different type of buyer. However, the temporary capability and value proposition roadblock was necessary to build a scalable sales strategy.

TARGETING...AGAIN

Sara's second discovery was a clear segment difference between companies with more than 100 employees and those with less than 100 employees. In order to succeed, InvoiceMe could only serve one of the segments.

ENTREPRENEUR'S CORNER

"Over and over we heard from Sara, 'This was another 300 seat opportunity and I just don't think we can meet their needs without a lot of custom integration work.' Once you've heard this debrief from 10 calls, a pattern starts to emerge.

From a practical perspective, I didn't have the engineers capable of customer-facing engineering on hand. If a 500 seat deal was almost closed and all they needed was to know we were ready to deploy someone to their office to do a custom integration, that person would have had to have been Mike or myself. If we deployed Mike or myself to do a custom integration, that would have been six months of the entire rest of our business running at fifty percent speed. As an entrepreneur, sometimes you have to let your path be defined by what you are working with. Chasing these big deals just didn't seem scalable to me at the time. The numbers just didn't add up."

From a revenue perspective, the larger companies were preferable because it would take fewer deals to generate the same level of revenue. However, from sales and engineering perspectives, smaller deals were preferable. Sales to larger companies typically required buy-in from multiple parties who were relatively

ENTREPRENEUR'S CORNER

Late January 2010, InvoiceMe thought they were finally getting their big break. Procter and Gamble called them out of the blue and asked if they could talk. Over the next few months, InvoiceMe had thirteen meetings with Procter & Gamble. Procter & Gamble was incredibly responsive, which initially told Will they were very interested.

A few weeks into the discussion, Will asked his contact if they could set up a focus group to get additional feedback on the product. They wouldn't commit. At some point, Will realized the contact did not have a title on her signature, but did not think much of it at the time.

After six months of going back and forth, their contact informed them she was leaving her position. Will asked if she was being promoted. She replied, "No actually, I am a summer intern and I am heading back to school for my senior year."

InvoiceMe had just spent the last several months on a potential customer they did not have a chance of winning. It was a valuable lesson. Just because a company is big and shiny and gives you the time of day does not mean it is your big ticket. Will never made the mistake of not properly qualifying a lead again.

removed from the product's value proposition. To serve the larger companies and interest their CFO, InvoiceMe's value proposition had to include integration with existing back-end systems. This would

require an entire consulting arm dedicated to executing the integrations. The decision became whether or not to build a consulting arm of the business.

Given InvoiceMe's limited capital, building a consulting and large sales arm to meet the needs of larger companies was not feasible. Not only was it easier to serve the smaller companies, but they began to see that their value proposition was also more attractive to companies with less than 100 employees.

THE SWEET SPOT

Smaller companies were almost always running Intuit's Quickbooks and were typically using home-grown Excel Spreadsheets for invoice management. A sales person would open a well-worn Excel template, type in the invoice amounts, print the form, sign it, staple the customer inquiry and walk the form over to the administrative employee. No one knew how or why the Excel template ended up in the current format. No one could remember back that far. They just knew that was the way they had always done it.

Will recognized most of these companies were in a situation where he could go in and say; "This is painful isn't it?" and hear a response to the effect of "Yes it is. I have to deal with all these spreadsheet quirks and manual processes just to submit an order." Better invoice management processes were a universal latent unmet need. In other words, invoice management was a pain in the ass. Further, there was no way the two-person IT group in a 50-person company could take two months off of a mission-critical task to fix the invoice management process.

ADAPTING TO CUSTOMER NEEDS

In the companies where they had at least one user, they would ask a user send them his/her custom invoice spreadsheet. InvoiceMe would then do three hours to a day of customer integration to get to the point where at the press of a button, the user could produce an invoice form in the custom format. Then, the user could go to the IT department to demonstrate how little work was required. InvoiceMe made it so the IT guys had an easy decision to make. The solution existed; all they had to do was say yes.

Now that they were selling primarily to businesses, a few additional adjustments needed to be made. InvoiceMe built a business check-out page targeted to CFOs and controllers. They worked on streamlining

ENTREPRENEUR'S CORNER

"If you are trying to sell to a 100 person organization with two IT guys, those two IT guys are running around like crazy. They're fixing the guy's computer who spilled Coke on his keyboard. They're showing the senior manager how to reboot his computer for the tenth time. But, when they know there is a problem that needs to be fixed and there is a cost and time effective way to fix it, there is a good chance of getting their attention. You have to show them the better way, convince them they could go roll it out in ten minutes if they wanted to and make sure all they have to do is press the 'go' button."

the sign-up and implementation process for businesses. The website and implementation were far from perfect for the first few customers, but InvoiceMe quickly learned what they needed to do differently from those first few customers.

MAKING MEETING CUSTOMER NEEDS SCALABLE

While building custom Excel spreadsheets was an effective way to get the IT guy and the CFO to say yes, InvoiceMe did not want to be in the business of building custom Excel spreadsheets. It was simply not scalable.

At the time, QuickBooks had over 85% small business market share with an installation base of just over five million companies. InvoiceMe decided to integrate directly into QuickBooks so its customers could literally just print out the checks when payroll time came around. In addition, all of the transactions could be permanently recorded.

FINDING THE RIGHT LEVEL OF SALES INVESTMENT

It took InvoiceMe a while, but by July 2011, they had finally figured out the right level of investment to make in the selling process, depending on the size of organization. Will figured for a five-seat business, the majority of the work needed to be done by the customer. If necessary, InvoiceMe would invest in a 30 minute kick-off call to answer any major questions. For larger companies in the 50-100 seat range, InvoiceMe was far more proactive. They spent time getting to know key decision makers in order to better understand their processes. In both cases, all conversations were conducted by WebEx and phone to save on costs.

CURRENT SITUATION

As of July 1st, 2011, InvoiceMe had over 2,500 paying users. While working with Intuit on the InvoiceMe/QuickBooks integration, Will realized that there is a complete overlap in their target customer base. Just as InvoiceMe had worked diligently to build strategic relationships with employees at Blackberry, InvoiceMe began to build strategic relationships with employees at Intuit. The relationships were mutually beneficial, with InvoiceMe getting access to a broader customer base and Intuit improving the offering to their existing customers.

In a matter of three years, InvoiceMe went from a glimmer of hope in Will Andrews's imagination to a well-tuned, growing business. While their success and growth has been substantial, Will continues to look into the distance for opportunities to grow and improve InvoiceMe.