

KEN DENMAN:

iPass CEO Creates His Own Future

By Aaron Ragan-Fore



Ken Denman (MBA 1986) has a talent for predicting the future of business technologies, but his insights do not require tea leaves or tarot cards. Denman is chairman and CEO of mobility technology provider iPass, Inc. In his world of software and communications, visionary thinking is not only an asset, it's part of the job description.

Foresight is a trait Denman inherited from his parents. Though they never attended college themselves, the couple ingrained in each of their five children the importance of learning.

"We worked hard in school," remarks Denman. "We were products of a military father."

Leroy Denman, a non-commissioned sergeant in the US Army, was transferred frequently. Ken, a gregarious kid, spent much of his childhood in Germany, before finally settling near Tacoma.

He enrolled at Central Washington University. And though he worked hard as a point guard on the basketball team, Denman found himself academically adrift. He changed majors often and half-heartedly considering a career

teaching and coaching, until a professor interceded. "He said to me, 'Don't wander' into this field, because it takes a passion for the work that I don't sense in you. Think about how you want to live and what you want out of life. You can do anything you want!" recalls Denman. "It was a pivotal moment."

Denman reassessed his goals. He wanted to continue playing basketball, but decided to redouble his academic efforts. Still unsure of a major, he knew he wanted to solve real-world problems while providing for his family.

"That lead me back to business, and back to accounting," says Denman. "Accounting formed a foundation for me."

After graduation, he worked for four years at Battelle Laboratories as a department controller, where he was exposed to cutting-edge research.

"It was clear to me that technology would evolve exponentially over the next many years, and I wanted to be part of that," says Denman. "I felt that an advanced degree would help get me to the next level."

He applied to the UW MBA program, invigorated by his time in the workplace. "When I went back to graduate school, I went back with fire in my belly," he says.

As at Battelle, Denman's uncanny ability to foresee business technology trends, and to apply that thinking to his career path, marked his time in graduate school.

"At the UW I was interested in two converging spaces: communications and computing," says Denman. That simple blueprint has continued to define his career for over 20 years.

His MBA in hand, Denman advanced through fiscal and technology oversight positions at US West and MediaOne, and in 2000 founded business solutions provider AuraServ Communications. Along the way, his insistence on the future importance of mobile technology riled tempers and met with strenuous opposition from some colleagues.

"Early in my career, I got the reputation of being a mobile bull," laughs Denman. "It allowed me to think through why I held beliefs, and to become articulate and persuasive."

Now Denman channels that focus and foresight into iPass. The company provides convenient and secure mobile Internet connections for corporate clients the world over, regardless of computer platform or communications device. That goal requires iPass to combine a diverse range of access technologies, including dial-up, Ethernet, broadband, wireless network "Wi-Fi hotspots," and broadband mobile data networks such as "3G."

Denman's commitment to varied delivery methods has paid off. In February, *Forbes* named iPass one of the Top 25 Fastest Growing Technology Companies for 2005.

"When I came to iPass, the personification of the company was about dial-up," says Denman. "I've worked really hard to use broader terms. I don't know what the next thing will be, but there will always be something else. Our strength in software allows us to integrate the next important capability before the market decides it's important." ■