



## For California IT Services Provider, Success Is About Balance

*Accent Computer Solutions Holds onto its Family Feel in an Industry That Never Gets a Day Off*



[Marty Kaufman](#) looks like he could be leading a hard-charging Silicon Valley startup. Trim and fit, he has time at General Dynamics and a CIS degree from Cal Poly. But this is Southern California's Inland Empire, not San Jose. And here Kaufman has built a sustainable IT services business with elements not normally associated with its cost-is-king industry. At [Accent Computer Solutions](#) Inc., there is work-life balance, controlled growth, and geo-diversity among the roughly 50 employees.

Kaufman laughs as he says, "My catchphrase is: We don't want to torture our employees or our customers. But seriously, what that means is that if you're working your employees too hard and you're not delivering sufficient services to the client, then both are unhappy."

Accent's information technology services include support, consulting, managed services, and cloud computing solutions for small and midsize businesses, most of which are in the



Southern California area 45 miles east of Los Angeles. The company's goals are to reduce clients' risks along with costs, and to boost productivity by increasing employee efficiency.

Over 30 years, thousands of Southern California businesses have used Accent, which has built a reputation among employees sufficient to make it one of the [Inland Empire's Top Workplaces](#) two years in a row.

## Keep the People, Keep the Culture

Accent was an invention born of the necessity to stay put. General Dynamics was looking to shift a workforce to another state, and Kaufman, who developed and managed the IT department for six years starting in 1984, wasn't going.

"General Dynamics was moving from Southern California to Arizona, and we all had to either go to Arizona or find something else to do," Kaufman recalled. "So in 1987, I decided to found this. Of course, that meant working nights, weekends, and everything else. I just worked constantly. I struggled when the kids had to be taken to school or had a soccer game. I remember thinking to myself, "just don't miss the soccer games." Soon enough, though, things changed.

"I read books by these amazing leaders who grew fantastic companies, but I knew they were terrible fathers and husbands," he said. "I realized I didn't want to wake up one morning and realize that I had missed watching my kids grow up.

+24%  
VALUES/ETHICS

*"Accent Computer Solutions operates by strong values and ethics."*

*ACS scored 24 percent higher than its competition in the IT: Managed Services & Outsourcing benchmark.*



“So I said from the beginning that we’re going to be a business that emphasizes winning as a team and has strong core values around work-life balance. I knew we might end up being smaller because of that choice. But I also knew I wouldn’t put myself or my employees in the position I was in when I was starting out.”

Kaufman’s motives are altruistic, but not completely so. Maintaining a work-life balance helps reduce burnout, a real threat in a 24/7 industry. “Turnover is a very, very costly part of any business, and it messes up a bunch of things. We want to avoid turnover and keep people as long as we can. When the people stay together, the culture stays together.”



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**Marty Kaufman, President, Accent Computer Solutions**

## ‘Happy Customers, Happy Employees’

Like most businesses, Accent has had to push through some rough patches. “We control the number of clients we bring on now to make sure we can deliver,” Kaufman said. “When you don’t do that – and I’ve been through it – the result is usually unhappy customers and unhappy employees. That leads to turnover, he said, “so I made a conscious decision that we will not take every possible situation and agreement that comes our way.”

He said, “When a company grows in a controlled and stable manner with lower turnover, it gives employees in that organization the opportunity to buy a house, or buy a car, or go to school, or put their kids through college. All of those things happen when you have a stable and happy workforce—and happy customers.



“Every week I tell our employees that what we want is happy customers and happy employees. Sure, it sounds cliché, but if we get that, the result is good for everyone.”

Also good for everyone is career development, another Accent emphasis.

“We are trying to advance everyone in the organization if at all possible,” he said. “We want to make sure they know where there’s more opportunity.” He adds that these days some advancement stems from a need for a succession plan. “I’m advancing,” Kaufman said.

## Keeping the Family Together

Accent is figuratively and literally a family business. Son Corey Kaufman, as the lead virtual chief information officer, leads the technical account management team. Daughter Courtney Kaufman is director of marketing.

“We don’t have private equity investors, although I probably get approached at least twice a month,” Marty Kaufman said. “At this point, I’m more interested in the family aspect of it. Maybe I don’t get to cash out when I turn 60, but I have the satisfaction of keeping the family together.”

At this point, the Accent family is not just in California, but in five other states.

“The technology allows us to be very spread out but still be able to get in and do what we need to do,” Kaufman said. “And if you have a good individual who lives in Louisiana or even the East Coast, you’re helping with time zone issues because you can start earlier and hold down overtime.”

## The Best Job in the Building

The IT industry demands constant attention, and Kaufman carries that approach into his management.

“When I see an area of the organization that’s having problems, I will turn to the leader in that area and ask, ‘What we can do to make that the best department in the building?’ and when a particular person is struggling, I’ll ask, ‘How do we make that the best job in the building? How do we make it so that the people are lining up to have that job?’ Any area that isn’t 100 percent where we want it, we’re focusing on how to make it the best in the building. And what happens when you do that is you find that you’re revamping everything over and again. So for us, every day is a process improvement.”