

# News Release

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## **Recipe for success: Expertise plus ethics the winning ingredients for African American entrepreneur**

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In the U.S. Air Force, the success of an organization depends not only on the professionalism and dedication of its members, but also upon the effectiveness of the organization's leadership. While knowledge and skill are essential to understanding the needs of an organization, it is equally important for a leader to apply a strong sense of values, ethics, and character to guide and influence their people to meet mission goals. The same applies for small businesses.

During African American History Month, many examples of successful African Americans are publicized, including small businesses that have beat all odds and achieved outstanding success. But an especially appropriate example for the Air Force Small Business community is a minority-owned, veteran-owned small business which embodies some of the best principles of business success as well as Air Force core values.

Richard Lewis, an African American and a 1989 graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy, is the owner of RTL Networks, Inc., a small IT sales and service company based in the Denver metropolitan area. He served ten years on active duty, beginning his military career as a Command, Control, Communications, Computer and Intelligence systems programmer at Langley AFB, Va. After separating from active duty in 1999, Lewis worked for leading IT and telecommunications companies such as Cisco Systems, Avaya and Qwest Communications, before deciding to establish his own company, RTL Networks, Inc., in July 2002.



Richard Lewis, CEO of RTL Networks, Inc., believes that ethics play a large role in business success. (courtesy photo)

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“My Air Force background and training were immensely helpful in the establishment of RTL Networks, and continue to serve me well in the day-to-day operations of the company,” Lewis said. “Not only did my Air Force career equip me with the education and experience required to operate a technology company, it also embedded a ‘can do’ attitude, built character, and instilled a strong sense of ethics.”

Recently, RTL Networks. was awarded one of the largest Cisco Systems Equipment Maintenance contracts (also known as Smartnet) in the Air Force. This contract supports the mission of the 50<sup>th</sup> Space Wing at Schriever AFB, Colo., which is responsible for the command and control of more than 140 Department of Defense satellites. RTL Networks has supported Buckley AFB, Colo., as a subcontractor, as well as numerous local, state and federal agencies, including the White House.

“I personally believe that it is our “customer first” way of doing business, combined with ethical behavior, that have made us successful thus far,” Lewis said. “This is confirmed by our customers, who regularly tell us that we are doing a great job of responding to their needs. This customer-first/ethical behavior combination also requires us to keep the customers needs in the forefront of our minds when recommending and selling products and services. I believe this is noted and appreciated by our customers.”

Lewis’s recipe for success for other minority-owned small businesses is straightforward: “Instead of focusing on being a good minority-owned business, focus on being a good business,” he said. “I understand that small and minority-owned business certifications may help us get a foot in the door, but the only way to be truly successful is to meet and exceed the customers’ expectations when given the opportunity.”

He also credits the wealth of experience and knowledge held by his engineers and sales staff, and has one bit of advice for small businesses.

“Regularly seek advice and counsel from your Air Force Small Business specialists,” he said. “These individuals know the rules of the game and, based on our experience, are genuinely interested in seeing small businesses succeed.”

Altogether, some pretty good advice from an African American who has been there, done that, whether it is in the Air Force or as an entrepreneur.