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The Story of Alternative

Founded in 1989 to provide a variety of technology infrastructure services, Alternative Technologies has grown to become a team of 35 who have earned the trust of progressive nonprofits and small businesses throughout the San Francisco Bay Area and beyond. In addition to fully managed IT services, cloud-based backup, and cloud platform support, Alternative Technologies provides traditional and cloud-based phone systems, and professional installation of WiFi networks and low voltage wiring infrastructure.

A dedicated core of workers, including the founder, has steadily grown the business for over 30 years, through changes in evolving technology, economic turmoil, the headwinds faced by racial and social justice movements, and most recently the COVID-19 pandemic. Alternative has successfully navigated these changes through the vision, dedication and skill of its workers.

Alternative developed an exceptional and unusual workplace culture that focuses on building progressive power in collaboration with our clients. Many of our staff have over 20 years of experience at Alternative, and our clients know our commitment to their core mission and needs. In fact, for the many client organizations that we have supported for 20-30 years, we serve a crucial role by providing institutional memory and stability as they undergo staff changes. Our culture and client base are mutually supportive.

Our business is unique among IT and telecom service providers in our area for two reasons.

First, we are a vertically integrated organization that can provide all IT technology, physical infrastructure, and telephony services required by small-to-medium-size organizations. We have expanded our products and services as information technology services and security needs have become more complex and specialized.

Our product and service offerings fall into three broad categories: **IT Services**, **Telecom**, and **Wiring**.

- **IT Services** include technical support and maintenance, technical consulting, software and services vendor account management, and hardware sales. We build, manage, and support ITS networks for our Managed Services clients.
- **Telecom Services** include installation of on-premise telephone systems, cloud phone service, SIP trunks, and technical support and maintenance. We recommend the appropriate phone service and system that fits an organization's needs, then implement and support it.
- **Wiring Services** consist of low voltage wiring and WiFi network installation in commercial spaces, including voice, data, wireless access points, audio/visual, control and alarm wiring, camera wiring, coaxial cable and fiber optic cable. We have provided low voltage wiring for over 25 years and are fully licensed, bonded and insured.

it's all connected

Second, our original mission was to support the progressive nonprofit sector, so we are attuned to the unique needs of nonprofits, co-ops, and values-aligned small businesses, and can partner with them much more effectively than similar businesses in our region. We share a mission and values-based approach that is common among our clientele. We have a diverse staff that cares deeply about the causes our clients work hard on every day. We deliver our high-quality services and technical solutions to the nonprofit community, which is typically overcharged and underserved, within the nonprofit organization's budget. Our service and support culture has carried over well to our local for-profit small business clients.

As a service provider, we are available to help our customers anytime they need it. While we operate during West Coast business hours of 8am-5pm Monday-Friday, some of our customers are open early or late, or may have satellite locations and staff in other time zones. Others, like a shelter or residential treatment facility, operate 24 hours a day. To serve these customers, we have technicians on call 24/7 for emergencies. The staff who share these duties in rotation are employees, not contractors, and are available to troubleshoot and escalate technical issues remotely, or to dispatch in person to a client location when needed, at any time on any day of the year.

While we're proud that our growth in recent years has allowed us to offer some of our employees the flexibility to work remotely, our home base and office remain in the heart of Berkeley, California. Alternative Technologies maintains a physical office and warehouse located in West Berkeley at 1050 Heinz Ave. Close to Interstate 80, the San Francisco Bay Bridge, and several freeway interchanges, this location gives our field technicians and onsite staff access to the entire Bay Area, and places us in the most populous and dynamic region for progressive organizations and businesses, the client community we're honored to serve.



From founder Jerry Skomer, in his speech announcing his offer to sell his company to its workers:

"The technology sector is a cruel sector because it's constantly changing. I think because of that constant change, a cooperative — where all staff are owners, and all staff are equally involved — is the best answer because there are more minds thinking about it constantly in an ownership capacity. Everybody gets an equal chance, and the best ideas win."

"I like to think of a co-op as a bundle of sticks — the bundle is harder to break."

