

# HOW A ONETIME SLACKER MOTIVATES STUDENTS

**Mike Neubig**  
Capture Education

Three-year growth **1,551.7%**  
2014 revenue \$2.1 million



Capture Education founder and CEO Mike Neubig, 47, was a high school underachiever. Now his New Albany, Ohio-based software company helps administrators steer students like him toward success.



**I GRADUATED** from high school with a 2.4 GPA. Academics weren't a big priority; my dad's

education stopped after the eighth grade, and my mom had a GED. So they didn't push me too hard, and the school had low expectations for me.

**STILL, I WANTED** to play football, so I went to college and started taking classes I was interested in. After freshman year, I always made the dean's list.

**AFTER GRADUATING**, I wanted to help kids like me, who had what it takes to be successful but without anyone recognizing that. I was a teacher and guidance counselor, and then I started advising schools about curricula that group students according to their interests, not just their grades. In 2011, we started producing scheduling software to place kids in classes on the basis of questionnaires that assess their personality traits and learning styles.

**SCHOOLS THAT USE** the program have boosted enrollment in honors and advanced-placement courses by 33 percent and reduced dropout rates in the ninth and 10th grades. A fifth of New York City public high schools use our software, and 650,000 students use our system nationwide—more than 800,000 will by the end of the year.

As told to SARAH TODD



**BUDDING BUSINESS**  
Andy Joseph thought his customers were extracting oil from lavender and mint—not weed.

# No 24

## FINDING MARIJUANA AFTER THE MILITARY

Andy Joseph Apeks Supercritical • Three-year growth 8,249% • 2014 revenue \$9 MILLION



Andy Joseph, 43, went from working on nuclear submarines for the U.S. Navy to engineering machines in his garage. Then the former military guy's Johnstown, Ohio-based business gained an unexpected following—in the booming legal cannabis industry.

**MY FRIENDS JOKE** that I'm the most knowledgeable non-stoner possible. I guess I'm a square. I tried pot once in high school and haven't done it since.

**I WENT STRAIGHT** from high school to the Navy, where I operated nuclear propulsion plants on submarines. That helped pay for college. I started doing welding and fabrication on the side to make a few extra bucks. After I graduated, I got a job as an engineer and was promoted to management, but I missed getting my hands dirty. So I kept taking on side projects, working out of my garage.

**I DESIGNED AND** built botanical extraction machines. They extract the oil from things like vanilla or cayenne or mint and make it into a concentrated flavoring. I was selling them all to one guy, who would sell them to the ultimate customer. I never had much exposure to the customer base.

**BY 2012,** I was working almost every night and weekend. It was clear I had to choose between what had become two full-time jobs.

**WHEN I WENT** out on my own, I started working directly with customers. I started getting phone calls from people who seemed kind of coy, saying things like "I'm in California. I'm doing ... lavender." It never crossed my mind that they were dancing around something. Finally, one customer said he was doing lavender, and I said, "Wow, there's a lot of lavender in California." And he said, "Are you kidding me? We're doing pot."

**HOLY SHIT.** I was so naive. I stammered my way through the rest of the phone call. Afterward, I told my wife, "I think the majority of these customers are selling pot," and she gave me this look like, "You're not serious, are you?"

She just assumed I already knew that *lavender* was a code word for cannabis.

**I DECIDED** early on to make a full commitment to the cannabis industry. It's an entrepreneur's dream: explosive growth, a pretty big market with potential to continue expanding, and a legal landscape that's just risky enough to keep the big boys out. Still, it took me six months before I had the balls to put the word *cannabis* on my website.

**THERE ARE SO** many challenges to working in an industry that's coming up from underground. Most of my customers want to pay with cash. Fortunately, I've been able to find creative ways to use banking to prevent people from showing up at my house with \$50,000 in cash.

**MARIJUANA IS** illegal in Ohio, but even when I travel to meet potential customers on the coasts, I don't use it. I've had people look at me cross-eyed, like they're wondering if I'm a cop or a fed. But in my mind, even if pot were my thing, I'm not there to party—I'm there to do business.

As told to KATE ROCKWOOD • Photograph by CHRISTOPHER CHURCHILL