

Joe Perle Navigates Boom-bust Waters with a Steady Hand

BY JED HENSON

Perle Systems is celebrating its silver anniversary this year, the 25th year the company has been in business selling computer networking products. In an industry sprinkled with corporate newcomers—Perle Systems was selling controllers a full 10 years before Cisco Systems opened its doors—this makes the company something of a networking patriarch. Joe Perle, founder and current president and CEO of the company that bears his name, is using the wisdom gained through these years to chart his company's future.

In the beginning, Perle Systems built and sold controllers designed to connect branch office computers with a centrally located IBM mainframe. The company continued to build connectivity products for new IBM computers as

they appeared, including System 34, 36, and 38 servers, and eventually the AS/400 (iSeries). When the sales of the Black Box took off, Perle System's products were in perfect position for rapid growth.

Initially, the company focused primarily on maintaining and developing its AS/400 niche. In recent years, however, it has expanded into the "open systems" connectivity arena. According to Joe Perle, the reason for this shift was twofold. "We ended up with very high [iSeries] market shares, impairing our growth," he said. "And the industry and even the AS/400 itself began moving from propri-

etary to open, IP-based systems."

The company therefore began to add to its IP connectivity product line through its own development and the acquisition of other companies. Perle now defines his product line as "IP 37▶



Joe Perle, president and CEO of Perle Systems, says his company is "positioned very well for when the market comes back."

