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STEPHEN NELLIS PHOTO

Ron Zamir, president and CEO of Santa Barbara-based Global Power Supply. The company designs back-up power systems for critical facilities, such as hospitals and law enforcement centers, and huge corporations including Facebook and Bank of America.

Big name in backup

Global Power Supply keeps Facebook's lights on

By Stephen Nellis
Staff Writer

Time is money. And for huge companies like Facebook and Bank of America, data center downtime because of a power outage is money lost. Lots of it.

To keep the lights on at their server farms, both Bank of America and Facebook have turned to Global Power Supply, a Santa Barbara firm founded in 2004 that provides custom back-up power systems. In particular, Facebook tapped Global Power Supply, which goes by GPS for short, to design the back-up power systems for its huge new energy efficient data centers in Oregon and North Carolina.

GPS customers are "critical facilities" such as law enforcement operations centers, hospitals, payment servers at big financial firms or data centers for top-shelf tech companies — basically, anywhere there's a high priority on an uninterrupted flow of electricity.

"There's a lot invested in keeping this uptime," said Ron Zamir, president and CEO of the company. "They're willing to pay significantly more to reduce their downtime to seconds a year versus minutes a year."

GPS systems are often based on diesel or natural gas generators and any other equipment — from fuel tanks to weather-proof buildings — to make the systems work. Instead of a Bank of America or Facebook dealing with dozens of distributors and suppliers, the customer will tell GPS what it needs and then let the Santa Barbara firm handle the rest.

For example, Zamir said, one data center client needed four huge generators in a single 50-foot-wide by 70-foot-long building where technicians could walk back and forth between them. GPS designed it, had it loaded onto truck beds, delivered and put together. "In effect, it was like a modular building, delivered to the site and assembled on the site," Zamir said.

With the Facebook projects, GPS worked with Facebook and MTU Onsite Energy to solve a tricky problem. Facebook's facility sits at an elevation of 3,500 feet, and the thinner air affects the performance of diesel engines and their generating capacity. GPS and Facebook engineers went to MTU's Minnesota factory to meet with the firm and find a fix.

"Global Power Supply has been a valuable member of our data center deployment team," Jay Park, director of data center design and construction at Facebook, said in a news release. "Their expertise in standby power applications as well as their competent and responsive project management approach has allowed us to meet our project goals."

GPS is also in the business of managing back-up power systems and recently won a contract with Santa Barbara Cottage Hospital on the South Coast. GPS also has a facility in Texas where it takes in used generators and refurbishes and repaints them, in effect recycling major industrial machinery that can weigh several tons. The firm purchased a big generator from UCSB to resell, letting the university recoup some value from a piece of equipment it was no longer using.

GPS has about 20 full-time employees and expects to hit $37 million in revenue this year. "We run a very efficient operation," Zamir said.