



The co-founders of Azalea Health Innovations, from left, CEO Baha Zeidan, CIO Dan Henry, and CFO Douglas Swords in the lobby of the building where they have their offices. (Photo by Paul Leavy)

## An innovative idea

By *David S. Rodock*

**A**zalea Health Innovations started out as a simple idea — three Valdosta State University graduates wanted to supply regional medical professionals with cutting-edge software.

Three years later the business has grown into a nationally recognized company.

“Doug Swords, Dan Henry and I were working at a nearby doctors laboratory in Valdosta for a few years and we saw that there was a real need for health care automation for the utilization of medical records and medical offices,” said Baha Zeidan, co-founder and chief executive officer. “We saw that there were a number of

medical offices and physicians that were still using paper charts and paper claims. There was a growing need to automate these into digital form.”

Azalea Health Innovations provides clients with a number of products and services, despite the fact that its main competitors, such as GE Health, have multi-billion dollar budgets and larger software-design teams.

“When we first started out, we were demonstrating our products in Atlanta to a company laboratory and they thought that we had the best product in the market,” said Zeidan.

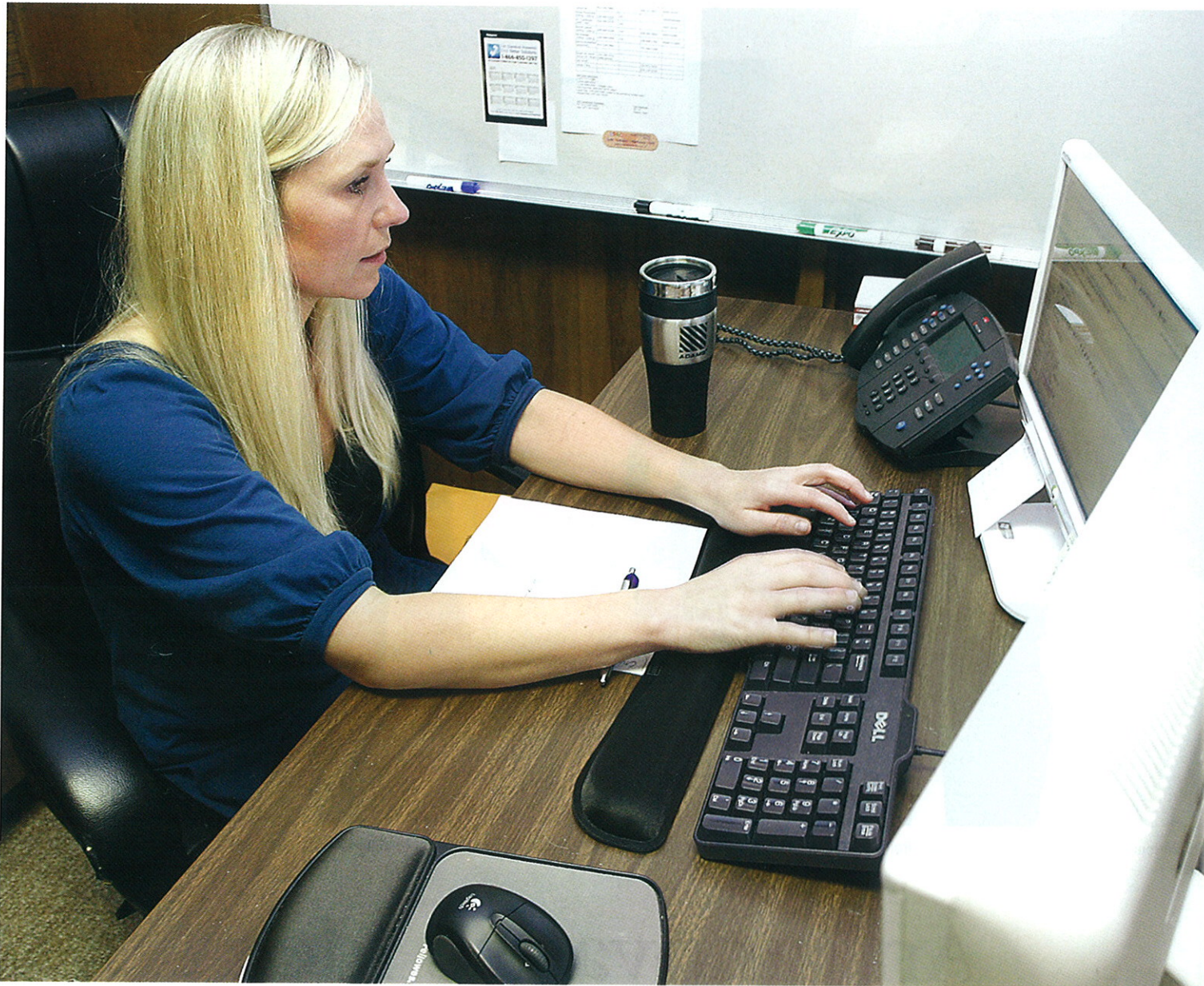
Zeidan described the reaction of the executives as really quiet once they learned

that Azalea Health Innovations wanted them to be its first clients.

Needless to say, Azalea Health Innovations was unable to get the contract, and the company went with a larger corporation offering, Zeidan said, an “inferior product.”

“We have overcome these challenges with persistence,” said Zeidan. “We refuse to take no for an answer and we kept hitting the pavement to get those initial clients. Once we got a few clients, we did everything we could to keep them happy and it has kind of snowballed from there.”

According to Zeidan, part of the secret to Azalea Health Innovations’ success is software ease of use, whether that means cross-



Azalea Health Innovation client relations manager Ashley McGahee builds and maintains the healthcare community and Azalea Health, and provides education and training for their clients. (Photo by Paul Leavy)

compatibility between operating platforms or its cloud-based products, which allows clients to eliminate the need for infrastructure, installation or maintenance.

"Word of mouth has been great for us; we have a strong team with talented employees that work very well together," said Zeidan. "We pride ourselves on excellent customer service, always trying to enhance ways that we can keep our customers happy."

One of the first victories for the company was winning the 2008 Guardian Bank Business Plan Competition, hosted by the Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce, which gave them \$15,000 in

start-up capital along with about \$35,000 in other services.

Doug Swords, chief executive officer of Azalea Health Innovations, said the original business plan they developed for the competition was used for a number of initial meetings with potential clients.

"We took our plan to banks and were able to get a line of credit with Suntrust Bank which is usually only given to companies that have been in business for at least a couple of years," he said.

Because the company is located in Valdosta and the three founding members all graduated from Valdosta State University, they continually work with their alma mater

to recruit new talent.

"VSU has been a great place for us to identify talented programmers from the computer science program," said Zeidan. "We always have internships and I've made visits to the college to speak to marketing as well as make donations to a number of VSU foundations."

Now that the business is successful and growing rapidly, Swords said a lot of the companies they originally approached are calling back to take another look at their services.

On the Web  
[www.azaleahealth.com](http://www.azaleahealth.com)