



## 3E CEO is visionary with experience growing companies

By PADMA NAGAPPAN, Special to the Daily Transcript  
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Transforming companies and ramping up growth significantly is Robert Christie's particular talent. He is president and CEO of **3E Co.**, an environmental, health and safety compliance service provider based in Carlsbad.

The firm will soon be acquired by **Verisk Analytics**, a risk-assessment company. 3E will be a wholly owned subsidiary with its current management team in place.

When Christie came on board in 2004, he requested feedback from customers and quickly learned that they were growing globally and needed compliance support in markets outside North America.

"It turned out to be the best decision we ever made. Today, more than 50 percent of our work comes from outside the U.S.," Christie said.

He grew up in New Jersey and worked mostly in the East before moving to San Diego. Over a 25-year career, he has racked up several impressive achievements.

When he headed **Thomson Learning**, he grew the business division of a domestic book publisher from \$500 million to \$1.4 billion. He joined the company at a time when it was trying to decide what it would be when it grew up, he said.

In line with the strategy of always being No. 1 or 2 in any geographical market in publishing educational materials, he grew the company organically with new products and through some acquisitions.

He credits mentors such as Howard McGraw, when he was with **McGraw-Hill**, and his boss at Thomson for having had a huge impact on him.

At 3E, business process outsourcing in the area of material safety data sheets has become big business. This is a document required by law for any hazardous chemical.

"If you buy lipstick from a drug store that contains such a chemical, the store needs to have an MSDS for it. If you think about the millions of products stores carry, they can't

track all of the documents they need to have on hand. That's where we come in," Christie said.

The firm was the first to offer this service two decades ago, and it has now become the core of its business -- how to manage the data and keep it updated.

Differentiating his firm from competitors, Christie pointed out that storing data is a commodity, but the key is to manage meta-data within each document and help customers keep on top of it.

He said 2010 was much better than last year. "I've been through many recessions, but this was one of the worst and every client was affected."

3E focuses on retail and transportation markets. As clients started to ship more goods, they needed more help being compliant.

Jeffrey Starr, vice president of marketing, said Christie's key contribution to 3E has been transforming it from a service provider to a total solutions provider, and injecting it with vision.

"I like to hire people smarter than me. I knew very little about this business coming in and I depend on people who know it well," Christie said. "You got to give people enough room to make mistakes."

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