

NEWS

United States Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney, District of New Jersey
970 Broad Street, Seventh Floor
Newark, New Jersey 07102



Ralph J. Marra, Jr., Acting U.S. Attorney

More Information? Call the Assistant U.S. Attorney or other contact listed below to see if more information is available.

News on the Internet: News Releases and related documents are posted at our website.
Go to: <http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/nj/press/index.html>

Contact: gonz0618.rel
Michael Drewniak, Public Information Officer FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
973-645-2888 June 18, 2009

Former Technology Chief at N.J. Company Admits \$900,000 Expense Voucher Scheme, Implicates Co-Conspirator

(More)

Public Affairs Office
Michael Drewniak, PAO

973-645-2888

<http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/nj/press/index.html>

NEWARK – The former head of information technology at a Mountainside-based company pleaded guilty yesterday to charges that he conspired with a former chief financial officer and others to bilk the company of approximately \$900,000 in a phony expense voucher scheme, Acting U.S. Attorney Ralph J. Marra, Jr., announced.

Robert Gonzalez, 36, of Lake Mary, Fla., admitted that he recruited the company's former CFO, Geraldine Manuel, of Westwood, and others in the finance department and individuals he supervised in the IT department to participate in the embezzlement at Comstock Images, Inc., an international supplier of professional photography images.

Gonzalez pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Dennis M. Cavanaugh to one count of conspiracy to commit mail fraud and wire fraud, which carries a maximum statutory penalty of 20 years in prison; and two counts of tax evasion, each of which carries a maximum statutory penalty of five years in prison. He also faces a maximum fine of \$250,000 and a mandatory order of restitution.

Judge Cavanaugh scheduled sentencing for Oct. 15. Gonzalez is free on a \$100,000 secured bond.

Gonzalez and Manuel were both arrested on Oct. 15 on an Indictment charging them with the scheme against Comstock. Manuel remains under Indictment.

At the plea hearing, Gonzalez admitted that on numerous occasions, he and Manuel used his Comstock American Express card to make personal purchases worth up thousands of dollars at a time for such things as vacations, furniture and high-end electronics. Gonzalez said that he would then create expense reports for what appeared to be legitimate purchases of computer and IT-related equipment for Comstock in amounts approximating the personal purchases they had made. Manuel, he said, would then issue Comstock checks to pay the American Express account.

For example, Gonzalez admitted that in June 2003, Manuel charged \$2,520.86 to his Comstock American Express card for travel to Orlando. He subsequently created an expense report totaling approximately \$2,678 which he claimed was for company computer equipment. In fact, he admitted, the expense report was to cover Manuel's travel-related purchases, and Manuel subsequently sent a check for approximately \$2,678 via FedEx to American Express.

Gonzalez admitted that the scheme worked the same way when he and Manuel went to a Circuit City in Union in July 2003. There, Manuel purchased a plasma television and other electronics totaling more than \$16,700, which was charged to the Comstock American Express card.

Gonzalez admitted that, with minor exception, these and other allegations contained against him and Manuel in the Indictment returned last October are true.

(Follow this link to get the Indictment and original press release:
<http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/nj/press/2008releases.html>)

According to the Indictment, Gonzalez used the scheme to spend lavishly on himself.

In 2002, Gonzalez charged \$10,098.68 to his Comstock corporate American Express card for a Royal Caribbean cruise for him and his wife. Another time, after Gonzalez made a series of purchases for plane fare, restaurant bills and Walt Disney World tickets for him, his family and friends, Gonzalez sent a fraudulent expense report for \$21,089.31 to Comstock for invoices that were both fictitious and inflated. Manuel allegedly then sent a Comstock check in that exact amount in payment of the fraudulent company expenses.

In pleading guilty to tax evasion, Gonzalez admitted that he failed to report \$271,329 in taxable income from the expense report scheme for tax year 2002, and failed to report \$391,390 in taxable income from the scheme for tax year 2003.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Lorraine Gerson.

Marra credited Postal Inspectors with the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, under the direction of Postal Inspector in Charge David L. Collins; and Special Agents of the IRS Criminal Investigation Division, under the direction of Acting Special Agent in Charge Julio La Rosa, with the investigation leading to the guilty plea from Gonzalez.

– end –

Defense Counsel: Rick Jancha, Esq., Florida