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Andromeda Technology Solutions – A Managed Service Provider Meeting the IT and Building Security Needs of their Manufacturing Customers in The Midwest

A Managed Service Provider that Not Only Understands Technology but Also the Businesses and Industries They Serve



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“We spend a lot of time trying to make sure we understand the business and how they operate and where they make their money as well as what is critical to them. We need to know, if a manufacturer's ERP system is down, can they still manufacture. We need to know what is mission-critical, so we can keep that running.” Jeff Borello

CEOCFO: *Mr. Borello, Andromeda Technology Solutions has a long history; what is your focus today?*

Mr. Borello: Essentially, we are an outsourced technology company and the reason that is a little vague is because we have two different divisions. Primarily we are a managed service provider in the IT space. A lot of time that is for companies that do not have an IT department, they outsource all their IT to us - service desk, and network infrastructure management, projects, etc. You also will get some companies that do have some IT staff and they are just looking for someone to help them with all the higher-end work or projects. Those are the two pieces on the IT side of the world.

We also have a building security group that focuses on physical security. We are talking about things like CCTV security cameras, electronic door access control, burglar alarms, and door intercoms. Between those two we cover a lot of things. Generally, it is small to medium-sized businesses, more medium than small, and typically not all the way up in the enterprise.

CEOCFO: *Was the building security a deliberate decision or did it develop organically?*

Mr. Borello: We started in the IT space. This was way back in the day before managed service providers were even a thing. If something was broken, you call us and we fixed it and everyone went on their merry way. At some point, someone we knew was familiar with installing telephone systems, so for quite a while we were in the business of installing and servicing business telephone systems and as we started adding staff in that realm, one of the people we hired had a lot of experience in the security industry, so all those things made a nice naturally bolt onto what we did for companies.

Companies would ask us if we could take care of the phones, and then they asked if we could help with their building security. It happened a little bit organically but it was certainly a strategic decision to go ahead and add those services on.

CEOCFO: *What is different about dealing with the industrial side, with manufacturing companies as opposed to more general tech companies?*

Mr. Borello: There is probably 80% of the technology stuff, especially in the IT world that is almost the same no matter the industry. Everybody these days needs tight security, everybody needs email. There is some level of network computing cloud. Everybody has that foundation. Then you start getting to that 20% where it is different, a medical client has medical records that they are dealing with whereas a manufacturer has an ERP system. With a manufacturer, some people are working on the floor and there are manufacturing devices that should be separated on the network.

Putting in wireless networking at a medical office on low ceilings is very different from putting it in a manufacturing space where you need lifts and you are working around machinery that may need to be working 24/7. It is that 20% where it starts being very different and you need to understand the market you are working in and understand the differences in the industry.

CEOCFO: *Let's take the 20% that is not standard. What have you learned over time about how to evaluate a potential or new client?*

Mr. Borello: A lot of listening. We spend a lot of time trying to make sure we understand the business and how they operate and where they make their money as well as what is critical to them. We need to know, if a manufacturer's ERP system is down, can they still manufacture. We need to know what is mission-critical, so we can keep that running.

Maybe another manufacturer can function for a while without their ERP system. Understanding each client so that we help them make the best decisions is critical. As good as we are with what we do, there is always something to learn. Technology is always changing. New software solutions are popping up every day, so it is about making sure we come in and provide the expertise we can, but then listening and learning about what is different about this particular client.

CEOCFO: *Would you give us an example of what you have learned recently from a new client?*

Mr. Borello: One of our clients is a manufacturer and one of their clients that they sell to has a very short turnaround in everything they need from our client's accounting - think a company like Amazon-you can't keep them waiting. At first, we didn't understand that our client's accounting group needed an enhanced, almost immediate level of service. They could not wait fifteen minutes for a call-back, they needed someone to do it in two minutes, so we needed to learn to adjust our process with them so that they could meet the needs of their customers.

CEOCFO: *When you are reaching out for new business how do you get across the fact that you are more in-depth and that you do pay more attention than others?*

Mr. Borello: It is a big challenge. It has become more of what people think is a commodity. We call it the iPhone effect. People wonder why they need an expert to patch and upgrade their systems, they pull out their iPhone and tell it to update and it does it. So it has become more of a challenge over the years. As regular end-user tech has gotten easier, everyone expects the business systems to follow that same path but instead, they have gotten more complex. We try to emphasize it in our marketing and try to make sure our sales guys are talking about it as a differentiator because it is, especially in the IT technology space.

There are so many people out there that understand the tech but they do not understand the business and they do not understand the customer. It is a big differentiator for us but it is about trying to get people to hear that difference and understand what it is going to mean for them because it is service and pretty intangible. Until people experience it, it is hard for people to understand it, yet there is going to be a difference between us and the guy down the street. I just talked to a client today who has been with us for about six months and she just couldn't say enough about it, she said the experience was so different from what they had from their previous two providers.

CEOCFO: *From the other side, how do you help companies that are on the managed services side, to realize they should not try to do things like updates on their own?*

Mr. Borello: We generally do not want to be someone's first managed service provider. We would much rather be their second or third because going from not having a provider to having a provider is a very different experience, especially for the end-users in the business. If they have a guy or a woman in the office and they are used to just knocking on the door, now it is different because there are lots of clients.

I just had a discussion this week where they said "You patched our server and now my application doesn't work, I should not have to pay for you to fix that." Just because we put the Microsoft patch on and it broke something, we did not do anything wrong, we were not negligent. Sometimes updates break things and it is just a reality. Some people understand that and some do not.

We want to have a partnership with our clients and we want them to think of us as a partner, so clients that view us as a partner and understand that the more of those things that we do, the more they let us do our job, the better off things are for everyone. The clients of ours

that are in a partnership understand that we are the experts. We need to work together on it but let us do our thing and there will be much happier people all around, us and them.

CEOCFO: *Andromeda has offices Chicago and Milwaukee. Do you find there is a different tempo in Chicago than in Milwaukee?*

Mr. Borello: For sure. Even in Illinois where we are located, if you go even thirty miles south from us it is a different tempo. I think Chicago is a lot like New York. Chicago has a different tempo. Chicago people are direct, we are hurry, hurry, hurry.

I think Milwaukee is a great city, we love going up there and we love the people. Even though Chicago is a rush, rush, rush, it still has that Midwestern feel, we are a Midwestern company and we have some vendors in the Midwest. Milwaukee has that Midwestern work ethic and there is a big manufacturing presence in Milwaukee they are hard-working people but they are a little more relaxed than the Chicago people and you just have to adjust for that and try to adjust everything we do to individuals.

CEOCFO: *How do you stay up-to-date with all the constant changes in tech?*

Mr. Borello: One of the ways I stay on top of it is I hired some great people. I was a phenomenal technician in the day and I can still hold my own but with all this new stuff that has come out, trying to be a business owner and learn new things on the business side with marketing and sales and keeping up on the tech side, you cannot do it all by yourself. We have been lucky to have hired some phenomenal talent here. They take part of it off my plate.

We also lean on our vendors. We are very loyal to vendors as long as they still get the job done well and they are a good partner, we will generally stick with them until there is a reason not to.

We have found especially on the security side of things for IT, that tools tend to have about a five-year lifecycle and then somebody comes along with a better mousetrap and at some point, you have to keep up-to-date on those. You cannot fall behind in the IT security arena, so that is a place where there are times when the technology will drive the need for a change. We are in the process of changing from somebody who was a great partner but something came along that was just a better solution and it was time to make a change. It is balanced like anything else and you just have to keep your eyes open and know when something has run its course and it is time to make that change.

CEOCFO: *Does the world environment, whether it is inflation, potential war or any one of the many macro challenges affect you day to day?*

Mr. Borello: I try to stay in my little world, I try to worry about what I can control. For the most part yes we try to ignore most of those things as far as what we are doing, but you cannot ignore them completely either because of things like the economy or an upcoming presidential election, we certainly do notice those things in our sales cycles. Anytime

there is uncertainty we find that people start to hold off and say "Oh well we are just going to hold off for another couple of months." So I wouldn't say change our long-term strategy around it and we probably in general would not change our short-term strategy because they seem to work themselves out in the short enough time frame to where you do not have to react to it but we certainly keep an eye on it. Nobody expected COVID, we had to make some serious adjustments for that and we did. So we kind of ignore it but keep our eye on it and do not react to it until we know we need to.

CEOCFO: *What is ahead for Andromeda Technology Solutions?*

Mr. Borello: We are doubling down in the manufacturing space. We are going to put a lot of time and effort into our marketing, into our understanding, into our partnerships around the manufacturing sector, so that is going to be a big push for us. Then it is just going to be about taking care of the clients, and taking care of our team because they are the most important part of our business.

We take care of our team first and let them take care of the clients. For the last couple of years, we won an award for "One of the Best Places in Illinois to Work." Then it is just about executing our next year's strategy. We follow a system where every three years we freshen our roadmap and then just work from the roadmap. That is one of those things that helps us ignore those short-term things that are going on. We have our strategy and take a look at it every year to make sure it is still on track and then just keep executing.

