

SQLSoft3 offers IT training at 30% to 50% off for IT Pro providing Courses in Azure, Developer, Identity Management, MOC On-Demand, Security, SharePoint, SQL Server, Windows 10, Windows Server, Amazon Web Services, Office 365, Business Development and Skype



Mark Scott
Chief Executive Officer

SQLSoft3, LLC
www.sqlsoft3.com

Contact:
Mark Scott
206-495-9980
marketing@sqlsoft3.com

Interview conducted by:
Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor
CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: Mr. Scott, what is SQLSoft3?

Mr. Scott: SQLSoft3 is a training and services provider. We provide technology training on Microsoft products and services as well as security awareness services. The key value is that we have figured out how to offer many of the same quality courses that others offer typically at 30% to 50% less cost.

CEOCFO: Who is coming to you to learn?

Mr. Scott: We do a lot of what we call private Corporate Training Events for companies such as Costco, Boeing, Premera, and more. The students are predominantly experienced corporate IT folks who are either re-skilling on the latest version or trying to get up to speed on adopting new technologies in the marketplace such as Azure, AWS, and Cloud Computing, not a new entrant into the industry. We also offer a broad portfolio of open enrollment courses including courses for non-technical managers managing IT resources.

"I'm continually impressed with the team at SQLSoft3 as I've followed this organization with interest over many years. For them to innovate these new, efficient, and economical educational approaches comes as no surprise," said Harry Brelsford, founder of SMB Nation. **"Introducing this kind of training model right now is extremely good timing as many IT Pros and Developers are seeking not only to improve their skills but also, in many cases, retrain or start new in the Cloud."**

CEOCFO: SQLSoft3 has been around as an IT training company since 1988. Does that make a difference for people? Do they recognize that or is it more "what can you do for me today"?

Mr. Scott: Many of the calls that I get are repeat business from training managers and individuals. We are a known commodity and a known entity on the West Coast and people have looked to us over the years to be forward thinking in terms of our offerings are what people want to know to keep current and take advantage of new technology and software.

CEOCFO: Do people tend to come back?

Mr. Scott: Yes. People tend to go through a series of technical training classes with us over a period of years. The average experience is people come first for a couple of classes then continue to take classes as needed.

CEOCFO: Is training as important as it once was? Are certifications as vital as they once were? What is the industry trend around accomplishment, education and authorization or certification?

Mr. Scott: It has changed a lot. Education is always going through changes; even more so today with more and more companies adopting agile development methodologies and so forth and the way that things are being rolled out in the cloud. This means that the idea of major software releases, which is historically how things have worked in the past, isn't as common as it once was. For example, getting certified for a specific software version has changed. Now, with agile development, technology changes tend to be incremental. This is a challenge for education companies and educators in general. The shelf-life of small bits of knowledge can be quite short. Because of that, the certification industry has changed too. Microsoft recently revamped their certification program to be an ongoing process rather a discrete certification. Someone earning a Microsoft certification must now pass an exam for a related skill on an annual basis. Additionally, vendors are coordinating with companies like Acclaim to offer "badges" that reflect that a person has specific skills or knowledge in addition to certifications. It's a bit more granular approach that better reflects specific skills. Certification won't go away. It continues to be desirable and sometimes a requirement, both from an employer and employee standpoint for career advancement for the employee and some skills validation for the employer. As new technology emerges, new certifications are being created to address and validate skills in these new areas, such as cloud computing and so forth.

CEOCFO: *What is the key to creating a good course; one that is effective and easy to follow?*

Mr. Scott: I think that often it is harder than people think. That is the short answer. SQLSoft3 offers channel training where Microsoft or other vendors invest in instructional designers and subject matter experts and they map certain objectives to certification exams. It is a very time consuming and integrated process to develop courses that way. However, we are creating courses that shift from focusing on product features to discuss and implement specific functionality relevant to our customers. Simply said, an effective training course really need to be relevant to the challenges that people are facing today verses, "Here is my product and it does A-B-C." That's why we at SQLSoft3 work with many independent recognized experts to develop some very specialized courses around the cloud, security awareness, Microsoft Power BI and more that are unique to us and offer incredible value for our students. That is really where it is the most fun to work. We are relying on people with deep industry experience and knowledge to bring the stories and challenges and solutions that they have developed over the years.

"I think the marketing messages are still well out in front of the considered and informed usage of the Cloud. I'm a big proponent of the Cloud but education is key to help people architect, build, and deploy secure and effective solutions without repeating the mistakes of the past." - Mark Scott

CEOCFO: *How do you know what to assume when you are developing a course? How much knowledge is the person expected to have? There are different levels of people who are taking the same course. How do you help all of them understand?*

Mr. Scott: That is always a challenge in the education space; level-setting the audience. To some degree you are always going to get a varied audience, so I think that speaks to why we spend a lot of time qualifying them before they come to class. You need to have a conversation with them to understand where they are coming from and you want to make sure that they generally have the prerequisite knowledge ahead of class. Then often it is up to the instructor to either fill in the gaps or decide, which does not happen all that often, where someone may just not be a fit. It is a little bit easier when you do private SQLSoft3 Corporate Training Events, in that you are working for a specific company and you can go in there and understand what projects they are working on what topics will be most relevant.

CEOCFO: *Do you do much of that?*

Mr. Scott: Yes, while we deliver a lot of public open enrollment classes, we work more with larger companies that are training groups of IT professionals, developers, or helping create a company-wide culture of security awareness for example. That is where the greater portion of our business currently is. When you enter an era, that I think is very similar to what we saw in the late 1990s, where there is a big shift in the technology landscape smart leaders see those trends and realize that they need to make a shift in the way that they are approaching technology or maybe their business has chosen to adopt technology as a strategic asset. In those cases, we see more of companies coming to us saying, "We have this initiative and we want to make a change, so we need to trained everyone on it."

CEOCFO: *What is the mix between online "in the cloud" and in person?*

Mr. Scott: Most of our private SQLSoft3 Corporate Training Events are held on-site and utilize the cloud to include remote participants who are unable to travel for budgetary or other reasons. Our open enrollment classes are overwhelmingly held in the cloud. Technologies like hosted labs, GoToMeeting, WebEx, and Skype make participating in a class remotely very simple and cost effective eliminating the need for travel. There is a dynamic to having all the students in the same

room with the instructor but the reality is that remote training is “good enough” and preferred by many to avoid the cost and hassle of travel. We are also seeing increased adoption of “on-demand” training like Microsoft’s MOC On-demand which utilizes pre-recorded lectures and an identical lab experience at price point is about a third or a quarter of the price of attending with a live instructor.

CEOCFO: *When you do the instructor-led classes, does the approach change at all depending on the corporate culture? Does it matter what a company is like or is a class a class?*

Mr. Scott: We call them SQLSoft Corporate Training Events and yes, the classes can change. That is one of the benefits of a setting up a private class. When we are going over the content of a course, a company might say, “It does not work that way here.” Therefore, prior to the class or classes, we must address the cultural realities of the company we are working with. Some people are more relaxed than others about security awareness. Others are very top down. It varies by company.

CEOCFO: *Would you give us a couple of examples of customer courses that you create?*

Mr. Scott: I work closely with, as I mentioned, several partners. We work with a gentleman by the name of Treb Gatte, who is a Microsoft MVP. He put together a very good Microsoft Power BI course on how to build dashboards using SharePoint data for CEOs, sales people, and others who need daily information. Many corporations have their data in SharePoint, so he put together a two-day boot camp around that. In addition, we offer a more in-depth three-day advanced course with Treb. We also work closely with Oxford Computer Group based in the UK. They have developed quite a bit of curriculum around the identity management space, specifically with active directory. We have several courses around IT security that were put together by an internationally-known security expert. They address general security awareness, cloud specific security, secure coding, incident response, threat modeling and penetration testing. These security courses are tailored to help a company develop an IT security culture for technical, business, and executive audiences. These courses were developed to meet existing needs in a rapidly changing space and the author/instructors regularly update the information in the courses. We are currently booked out with various Fortune 100-500 companies to the end of the year, but we still have openings if people are interested. (Sorry for the sales pitch, couldn’t resist.)

CEOCFO: *Do you do much outreach, either to students or to companies or as people know you do you rely on that?*

Mr. Scott: All of the above. Our #1 sales tool is word of mouth. We have trained over 50,000 IT professionals, developers, and security experts since 1999. We have an ongoing heartbeat with a marketing messages, schedules, new courses through email and social campaigns. We also work with training managers or project leaders inside of organizations to try to understand what may be going on inside of their companies and to see where we can help. We are always doing a lot of research; reading a lot of trade rags and talking to people that understand what is sticking and what the sticking points are. Then we are trying to either build or identify curriculum that exists so that we can address those needs.

CEOCFO: *What classes get the most traction today? What topics are people missing? What are you offering that you feel really should be engaged with more?*

Mr. Scott: My history with the SQLSoft company goes back twenty-five years. It has gone through several iterations over the years but the core is the same. What I am seeing is that from a training standpoint; obviously, the cloud is hot. Both Amazon AWS and Microsoft Azure are getting a head of steam as are Big Data, Analytics, and IoT which leverage the Cloud. Anything cloud-related is where the interest is and I think that’s also where people are missing the boat, especially on the security side. I think there are many parallels to what we are seeing right now in terms of what is going on in the Cloud and the Dot.com days in the 1990s. Many people putting their foot forward and utilizing the Cloud are not fully informed in terms of what they are getting in to or what they should consider. I think the marketing messages are still well out in front of the considered and informed usage of the Cloud. I’m a big proponent of the Cloud but education is key to help people architect, build, and deploy secure and effective solutions without repeating the mistakes of the past. In the “old days” your IT department could mitigate a lot of risk by keeping your corporate data behind a firewall and within your physical control but not anymore. More and more companies are moving their crown jewels (company and customer data) to the Cloud and it is very important that they are paying attention to where their exposures may or may not be and to address those challenges. Companies just need to understand what they are getting in to. It is an overused word, but it really is a paradigm shift here as things move to the cloud and people need to be more informed about it before they make decisions and why our offerings around IT security are so popular.

CEOCFO: *How do you help people understand that they need to do things today and not wait?*

Mr. Scott: There are always the early adopters, the laggards, and the mainstream. Cloud computing is enabling access to vast computing power and knocking down barriers to entry for innovators across the globe to compete. The length of time

between being an early adopter and a laggard is compressing and the pace is not likely to slow down. That is just a given. Now, how do you adjust your business to respond to this rapidly changing environment? People that do not jump on are going to find themselves getting their lunch eaten. We talk about technology taking away peoples' jobs. We talk about disruptive technologies and so on. That is just the world we are in. Unless you can get your arms wrapped around that and understand that is how the technology world is operating, you are going to have a pretty hard time competing. Therefore, "just give me the report," is now "I want to see my report on my cell phone." the good news is that many companies are developing technologies to enable us to do that and more! However, at the end of the day, we can't forget that we need training on the basic knitting, which is "What are you doing about keeping your data clean, what are you doing about keeping your data secure and are you confident you are presenting it to your customers in a relevant easily consumable way?"

CEOCFO: Why choose SQLSoft3?

Mr. Scott: We've got a long track record of delivering quality training. Moving our business to the Cloud has allowed us to reduce our overhead and be more nimble than our competitors. We can quickly pivot as our customers have more needs in certain areas. We've extracted a lot of cost out of the equation and can offer the same classes that others offer at 30% to 50% less. We are literally about a third less for the same quality instructor-led and recorded classes. Because of that, we fit more training budgets. While many of the other training organizations are limited to whatever training Microsoft provides, our expert partner program and the classes that come out of that enables us to offer classes about new technologies using the latest and greatest and most relevant content. We do pay attention and we try and field offerings that are relevant to today's computing environment. That is why people continue to train with SQLSoft3.

