

## IT Consulting, Support and Outsourcing for Small Businesses Enabling them to Leverage Technology and Protect their Data



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Interview conducted by:  
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**CEOCFO: Ms. Nelan, would you tell us about CMIT Solutions?**

**Ms. Nelan:** What I wanted to build was a company that listened to our clients, heard them and then provided IT services that were going to help them leverage technology for their businesses so that they could be successful in whatever that they do.

**CEOCFO: How is that different from the standard?**

**Ms. Nelan:** I think the big thing is listening. So many companies out there have great technology, great solutions but they fit what they have to match what you say you need and they are not really listening to the clients. They want to sell what they have. We try to flip that around. We ask a lot of questions about the actual business and what it is they are trying to accomplish and not just what kind of computers they use and why. We want to get a better picture of our clients so that we can better help them. That differentiates us and our clients tell us all the time that we really listen to them like it is some new thing but that is what makes us different.

**CEOCFO: How do you help a small business recognize what they want?**

**Ms. Nelan:** My background is business and that is what helps me to do this. I am talking to clients as a business person and not a technologist. I listen to what it is they are trying to accomplish. I understand their concerns. Most business owners recognize computers are important to their business. A lot of times they just assume there is not much that can be done – computers are going to break down, there are going to be viruses, and they think it is too expensive to do anything about it. I think education is the big thing here and letting them know what is going on in the industry, talking about how that applies specifically to their industry and how that applies to their business and what that is going to mean from a productivity perspective, for protecting their data and all the different elements that can make or break a business.

**CEOCFO: Do you offer managed services only?**

**Ms. Nelan:** Core clients are all managed services today. If we are going to service a client, it is not just going in and fixing something that is broken and walk away. We are looking for those long-term relationships and we want to make sure we are doing right by those clients not only today but far into the future. To do that, we need to be supporting their computers and keeping them running for them and protecting their data and that is a managed service.

**CEOCFO: Who is turning to you; is there a common thread?**

**Ms. Nelan:** From a geography perspective we service the greater Rochester, New York area. Most of our clients are generally between 10-100 employees. They are the folks that are relying on their computers on a daily basis and

understand it is something to invest in because the computers need productivity and they recognize the importance of their data. We tend to service a wide variety of industries but a lot of accountants and financial services and healthcare, especially with the regulations change in those industries. We also service manufacturing, daycare centers, you name it.

**CEOCFO: *How do you help your clients understand and deal with some of the security issues without frightening them too much?***

**Mr. Nelan:** It is education but sometimes we do have to frighten them a little bit. We do it in a gentle manner. We tell them the things they have to watch out for and the things that we can do to protect them. We do a lot of education seminars both publically as well as privately for our clients. We are teaching them about things to look out for. We are explaining how we put in multi-layers of protection; it is not just you load in an antivirus and you are all protected. We take them through all the basics and why we do those things. Depending on their business, their industry, their risks, we show them other things they might want to consider. It is a dialogue that is always continuing.

**CEOCFO: *How do you help companies understand that before they load their new version of Office or any other program, they may want to check with you?***

**Ms. Nelan:** One of the biggest obstacles to calling your IT partner is the fear that they will start getting charged the moment we pick up the phone. That's never the case for us. We always tell them when they call us and ask us a question, they are not getting billed for that. We tell them to call us, take the price tag out of the picture and just ask us or chat with us. It is partly that and partly being in front of our clients regularly. We meet with all of our clients quarterly with their management teams. We review what is going on so if there are questions or we are starting to see unsafe behavior, we can talk about it. We can listen to their concerns and be sure we are continuing to build an IT support model that works for them. It is a team approach and not just us vs. the user. There are risks out there and we are here to protect our clients.

**“What I wanted to build was a company that listened to our clients, heard them and then provided IT services that were going to help them leverage technology for their businesses so that they could be successful in whatever that they do.”- Cheryl Nelan**

**CEOCFO: *How do you reach out for clients?***

**Ms. Nelan:** I have tried many things over the years and what works best by far are our referrals. We have referrals that current clients provide us, partners that we have built up relationships with like types of services. Beyond that, we are doing webinars and live seminars as a way to educate the market and also build awareness of who we are. We get a lot through internet searches as well and more traditional marketing occasionally.

**CEOCFO: *Is being a certified women-owned business helpful?***

**Ms. Nelan:** It does. It helps by getting a foot in the door sometimes but nobody is going to buy from me because I am a women-owned business. There are some buyers out there who want to support women in the marketplace and do business with a women-owned entity. Sometimes there are grants where they have to spend a certain amount with a women-owned business. Those kinds of things are more the door openings. The fact that I am women-owned is not going to close the deal – I close deals because of the service my whole team provides.

**CEOCFO: *Do some people not recognize that women can be just as savvy as men?***

**Ms. Nelan:** We have come across that. I generally just ignore it. If it is a mindset that is so strong that nothing I say is going to change that mindset, then nothing I say is going to change it and they are probably not the right client for me anyway. Sometimes if we get far enough in the conversation where they start to listen, they realize I do actually know my stuff and I might be a good asset as a partner with them. It is rare though, most folks might be surprised by a women-owned business in the IT industry but not to the point where they do not think we can do it.

**CEOCFO: *You are a franchisee: what is the business structure?***

**Ms. Nelan:** There are 160 franchises across the country. All of us own a geographical territory so I am here in Rochester, New York. What that means is I cannot direct market outside of my territory so all of those marketing campaigns we talked about earlier are just here in Rochester. If I get a referral, I can take that business pretty much anywhere. I had somebody that used to work for me, moved down to Miami and knew somebody down there that was looking for an IT partner, so they called me and I am certainly free to take that if I want to. Likewise, we have a lot of clients that have multiple offices so they may have a main office in Rochester but have offices in another place, which makes the franchise nice because I can still provide the one point of service for all of their offices across the country but if I need feet on the street and somebody to actually go onsite in Miami for example, I just call the Miami office and they do that for me. Other than that,

the franchise provides us some core tools and services that we can leverage but we really run the business and design it how we want to go with the local culture.

**CEOCFO: Rochester has some weather issues. How does that come into play?**

**Ms. Nelan:** Normally I would say you probably have more of that as a factor because you have a hurricane and everything shuts down when there is a hurricane. We have snow storms and once a year we might have a couple feet of snow but by the next day the roads are all clear and everybody is working. It is rare that weather drives anything critical for us. Although, this year in March on a Wednesday and Thursday, we had 80 mph winds which is unheard of here and caused unbelievable damage with downed trees and power lines. The very next week on Tuesday and Wednesday we had the three feet of snow. We actually had a lot of businesses that were out of either power or internet or both. My office was closed down in the windstorm but it did not stop us from working. Some of my employees had internet from home and those that did not, found some place that they could go work from. We all just worked a regular day and made sure all of our clients were well supported. The nice thing about today's environment is we can work from anywhere and we can make things happen for folks.

**CEOCFO: How do you help clients that may have questions about phone service or mobile or areas that you do not handle directly?**

**Ms. Nelan:** We tell our clients we know a lot about a lot of stuff but we are experts in the IT infrastructure. When they start getting a little bit broader like phones, we can share some good high-level knowledge and we share some thoughts on that because we are their trusted advisor. But, when it gets down to the nitty gritty we are going to recommend a partner that we think will better serve them.

**CEOCFO: What surprised you at CMIT Solutions as the company has grown, evolved and prospered?**

**Ms. Nelan:** What still surprises me today is just how complex this world is and all the things we have to worry about especially as all the security risks just get crazier. There are a number of small businesses who get scared a little bit and then decide to handle it on their own. They think that an office manager working part-time that has maybe a little bit of IT background can protect their data and keep their computers safe even when they see all the news. It still surprises me how many folks are out there like that and it scares me.

**CEOCFO: Why choose CMIT Solutions?**

**Ms. Nelan:** It is because we are going to care about our clients more than any other company. I know a lot of companies say that but we listen, we are here for the long-term to help you be successful and we will help you take baby steps along the way; it does not have to be a strip-it-out and dump all the new stuff in. Let us help you get to where you want to be over time and be your trusted partner.

