

Cloud Based IT Solutions and Managed Service Provider improving Business Processes for Healthcare and other Compliance Centered Organizations



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“The shift in computing these days is making IT work for the company’s growth and profit instead of just being a cost-center.”- Dennis Gentles

CEOCFO: *Mr. Gentles, would you tell us about CloudFirst Technology Solutions?*

Mr. Gentles: CloudFirst is a cloud services organization whose mission is to deliver an enterprise-grade experience to any size of business to increase productivity, operational efficiency, and security levels. Additionally from a cost perspective, we can deliver this well within budget.

CEOCFO: *Should virtually every business be in the cloud?*

Mr. Gentles: I believe they should absolutely. That is where the trend of technology is going and adoption rates are supporting that. Even if an organization chooses not to move all of their workloads to the cloud, identifying what segment of their application environment can better serve the organization in the cloud is key. We have some clients that still maintain some on-premise applications, but the long-term goal is to get as much in the cloud as possible. That allows them to better support it from a remote access, distributed team structure which is where most organizations are today. Most businesses, even smaller companies, do business from various locations—and being without restriction to access key information has a bottom line impact to productivity and growth.

CEOCFO: *Is that the general feeling among business owners today or are there misconceptions?*

Mr. Gentles: There are a lot of misconceptions and a lot more education is needed about cloud infrastructure and applications. There are concerns about security, and concerns about having control over one’s data. As these misconceptions are cleared up and education is given and the understanding of why the cloud is a good choice is explained, we see more and more organizations moving in that direction. It’s estimated that by 2020 we are going to see where the majority of organizations have moved over to the cloud. Even now we see that almost every new startup and new organization that goes live, from the start are maintaining their business applications in the cloud. We definitely see a sharp upward trend there especially.

CEOCFO: *When might a company turn to you and what types of companies tend to reach out?*

Mr. Gentles: A company turns to us usually after they have done some research and they understand they need to make a change, and they need someone with a high level of domain expertise about cloud environments. That is when they want to begin creating their plan and roadmap to move over to the cloud. That is where we help architect a plan for them. It’s critical to have a clear roadmap as to how they can get there. We also have clients that are highly sensitive to regulatory requirements and compliance, so organizations who are concerned about that whether it be HIPAA compliance or be in compliance with Sarbanes-Oxley or with PCI, those are the organizations that tend to reach out to us more.

CEOCFO: Do you need to be on top of the regulatory issues yourselves or are you able to follow it through your clients?

Mr. Gentles: That is what sets us apart. Our value proposition and what makes us unique is that we maintain a lot of research on our own as to how to remain compliant and how the cloud or different cloud options will allow our customers to stay compliant. We have to stay a step ahead of those trends as we have to make sure our clients are always in front of the changes. We are able to consult and educate our customers on best-practices depending on which area of compliance they need.

CEOCFO: When you are assessing a customer's needs, what might you take into consideration that others do not recognize?

Mr. Gentles: The shift in computing these days is making IT work for the company's growth and profit instead of just being a cost-center. So making sure that the business practices, and goals as an organization is taken into account when designing new systems. What we do is engage C-level executives early in the process to get the direction of where the company wants to go. We take the business plan into account when we design their IT environment, so their IT operations are in alignment with their overall business plan. When we are making decisions and we are building a cloud architecture for them and putting infrastructure in place, we understand the roadmap ahead and where they are going. Cloud environments are a platform that companies can build upon for the future rather than a system that is put in place, and three years later you have to put a new system in or changes over time require a lot of cost and development resources. We build systems that are going to last and that can just be easily scaled vs. having to be ripped and replaced.

CEOCFO: Do many of your clients work with you on an ongoing basis?

Mr. Gentles: Absolutely, we have very long tenure with our clients. By the time we do an assessment with an organization, generally they continue to work with us on an ongoing basis in several areas such as general consulting, identifying new technologies they should be aware of as they come out; also with supporting what they already have in place. With any new projects they take on, we are the ones who give them their initial consultation and initial design of where they should go. We have a very wide knowledge base, and that adds a lot of value because we specialize in cloud but we fully understand the enterprise and all the various dimensions of it.

CEOCFO: What is your geographic reach?

Mr. Gentles: We have customers all over the country. In fact, the vast majority of our work is remote. We also have international customers. We have all the proven workflow to support large organizations and maintain full visibility of all the areas we are working on. We have very effective communication processes and project management best-practices that are world-class. We support customers globally in many cases.

CEOCFO: CloudFirst was recognized in Insight Success Magazine as well as CIO Review. What do professionals like about CloudFirst?

Mr. Gentles: We stay in front of new technology trends, and while we focus a lot on Microsoft Cloud we have the ability to work with any cloud vendor, and we often do. That, coupled with our deep domain expertise with enterprise on-premise systems, we are able to guide our customers towards making that transition in an easier way. We understand both on-prem and cloud environments, and what needs to be accomplished both from an IT and a business perspective. We also focus on education and intelligent user-adoption, that is what gets a lot of attention because if you implement it and people are unable to use it or understand it—it drives the success level down. We're very involved in the technology community in general and do a lot of guest blogs and participate heavily in the Community Connections program we partner with Microsoft on as well.

CEOCFO: How do you help your clients stay ahead of the quirkiness of Microsoft?

Mr. Gentles: We stay on top of what is coming and we anticipate these changes. One of the challenges companies have is they are reactive to the changes, which creates a lot of problems without a plan. Microsoft actually does put out a schedule as to when they are going to make certain changes—so we are involved ahead of the change so it is a seamless event for the client. Depending on the significance of it, we are hands-on during the time of the change and work with them to make sure they understand what the changes are and the differences. We have installed versions of Microsoft software within our own internal lab, so we have done the work ahead of time to prevent any disruption to our client's business.

CEOCFO: How do people find you from a web search?

Mr. Gentles: Microsoft supports us heavily sending many clients to us. Also, if companies search on Microsoft cloud partners we show up there.

CEOCFO: *Are there industries where you see opportunity?*

Mr. Gentles: We work in all industries, but we see a lot of changes in healthcare, which is the number-one industry that reaches out to us. We also see a lot of opportunity in the financial sector and retail. Those organizations tend to be actively looking at ways to move over to the cloud.

CEOCFO: *What do you look for in your people in addition to technical skills?*

Mr. Gentles: What is extremely important to us are people that have a high sense of customer service, technical fluency, and accountability. Our team is an extension of the client, so they need to know how to balance the project and the business objectives—there is a high level of critical thinking involved.

CEOCFO: *What is next for CloudFirst?*

Mr. Gentles: We are definitely continuing to expand on the success that we have already. We see more international customers and will be supporting those. Also, as companies become more informed on the benefits of a cloud environment, we act as a thought leader in this space to help organizations do it right the first time.

CEOCFO: *Why choose CloudFirst?*

Mr. Gentles: CloudFirst puts innovation first. We enable all of our customers to reach their goals and are more than just an organization that delivers information technology solutions. We are viewed as a trusted partner to the organizations that we work with and they continue to work with us for years. We have a vested interest in their success. Our secret sauce is the investment we make in our clients' success.

