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IoT Solutions, Consultants, Developers, Designers, Interactive Installations and Connectivity Platform for Enterprise, Aviation, Industrial Food & Beverage and Consumer Applications



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CEOCFO: Mr. Durand, would you tell us about Forest Giant?

Mr. Durand: Forest Giant focuses on the Internet of Things (IoT), experiential design, interactive exhibits, as well as enterprise and consumer applications. On one hand, we're a consulting firm that helps our clients map out and solve problems. On the other hand, we're a strategic development and creative design team that uses a unique iterative process to ensure our projects yield the best results for our clients.

CEOCFO: Would you walk us through a typical engagement so we can understand how you engage with your clients?

Mr. Durand: Many of our clients may have an idea or a vision for what they would like to do and it's our job to help them work through the best way to approach it. We work closely with them over a 2- to 6-week period (or sometimes longer) to understand who they are targeting, why they are targeting a particular audience, and how to map out the best technology solution.

We never just dive in and start building something; we take the time to do our homework and put the right strategy in place so when we move into the development cycle, we have collective buy-in from all parties regarding the project's vision and scope of work.

We've had projects for as short as two months to some that have lasted over three years. It is important we're constantly pushing out builds from a development standpoint and making sure what we're building is actually resonating with our target audience. Above all else, the projects that we build yield results for our clients. When our clients win, we win.

CEOCFO: How do you help a client recognize what they are really after?

Mr. Durand: Everything starts with an idea. An idea is driven typically on assumption. It's about how you gather quantitative and qualitative data to help validate the assumption, which turns ideas into reality.

We take time to understand the problems that our client is trying to solve. We identify the stakeholders that are involved with the problem - either internal to the organization or external customers - and get out of the building to talk to those folks. We want to understand if the problem is truly an issue and if so, figure out a way to solve it.

You must be actively engaged with every stakeholder, understand their pain points, validate that the assumed problem is actually the problem, and once you are able to do that, it helps to clarify what the tasks should be moving forward. We do that through interviewing and prototyping before we even get into a line of code. We may even conduct a technology audit in order to test the waters to ensure that we're on the right track.

While it can be labor intensive, the discovery process is fun and less risk-prone because it's hard to go back after pulling the trigger on development. Doing a lot of the critical work up-front is a massive cost saver that reduces a tremendous amount of risk for the client. Clients appreciate being active in the process by participating and collaborating directly with our team, which lends itself to collective buy-in that creates the alignment we need to successfully move forward.

CEOCFO: When you are putting together a concept, how do you keep your personal preferences out of the picture, and where does gut-feeling play a part?

Mr. Durand: Once you gather a lot of qualitative and quantitative data around a particular problem, it creates the foundation for you to make a more educated step forward. At that point, you go with your gut based on your years of expertise in the field.

“When you have been working on something for two years that Silicon Valley is calling the next big technology, that validation feels great and reaffirms we have been on the right track with our edge platform development. We are thankful that we have been involved in IoT since before IoT was even a buzzword, and have perfected a human-centered design approach to solving problems. That has given us an upper hand to provide a concrete solution to our clients and really help them think through how they can leverage IoT to enhance their brand, their company, and their consumer engagements. That is exciting to us.”- Dave Durand

For us, that expertise is in software development and IoT. We've been doing both for well over a decade, so at this point we're able to harness our expertise in those domains. In conjunction with the information and data we are able to gather, we're able to test some educated theories as we move forward in the production cycle. You have to go with your gut in a way that is very educated, but you need to test your theory or hypothesis to make sure you're on the right track. By doing that and rolling something out quickly, you're able to test that hypothesis and validate ideas, which is extremely pivotal.

You never want to disappear for eight months and not talk to a client and then roll something out, finding that nobody wants to use it or it does not meet the expectations of the client. You have to leverage your gut sometimes and have some fun with the project to see if you're on the right track.

CEOCFO: How does the public react?

Mr. Durand: I think individuals in today's world definitely want things that are easy to use. They want things that enhance their well-being and aren't over-the-top. I think that is why we are seeing forward movement with technologies like Alexa. Obviously, we all have phones today, but will we all have phones tomorrow? And in ten years, what will that look like? Technology can be infused into locations - leveraging all sorts of things that provide life a more ubiquitous feel - where it may not be so hands-on in the future.

We've had the opportunity to build interactive installations as far as Shanghai and Dubai. Many of those facilities were leveraging light and sensors to manipulate and enhance an environment, which moved away from the traditional touchscreen or iPad to create a more immersive and experiential feel. I think that's when we started to move into how you can leverage IOT and new technology to immerse people in unique and engaging ways.

We've spent the last year and a half building a platform that allows for easy device connectivity: running applications that can communicate seamlessly within certain environments, moving away from the touchscreen and into a more sensory experience -- in some cases, even smell. That is what we are starting to see, and there is a trend moving in that direction.

CEOCFO: Are you talking about STELA + IRIS as far as your platform?

Mr. Durand: That is exactly right. Time and time again we found ourselves reinventing the wheel when it came to device connectivity and communication. With our platform we're not spending so much time on device connectivity and application deployment, which helps to accelerate production for other project needs. We're able to put the platform into a facility quickly to get things communicating and talking to each other, which allows us to focus on the application.

We just used our platform at the Peabody Essex Museum to connect projectors and lights for a very immersive interactive environment. We also have it implemented at Flying Axes, an axe-throwing facility opening in Louisville, KY, which is the first venue of its kind infused with a layer of technology. All Flying Axes scoreboards leverage our platform, so it's easy to add and replace scoreboard applications whenever there's an update.

We're currently looking to use the platform in hotels as well as sports stadiums. The platform we've built allows us to move into facilities quickly and connect, which enables these larger opportunities to unfold. IoT can be an intimidating undertaking, but we're working to make it extremely easy and approachable.

CEOCFO: What is the competitive landscape and how does Forest Giant stand out if someone is looking?

Mr. Durand: We've had the opportunity to work with GE Aviation for years around the world, through which we've established a great network - we get the opportunity to work with a lot of other large companies. From a competitive standpoint, IoT is huge and there are a ton platforms that let you connect and interact through the cloud.

Our platform is different in that it can work on-premises and does not necessarily need cloud connectivity to operate and function. The term is edge computing, and we see a huge benefit in going that direction because as more devices become available, more data is going to be created. We are expected to go from 5 billion connected devices to 50 billion in just the next few years -- that is a lot of data being created. With this, more latency issues arise with device connectivity. How can you make sure things run and maintain a level of reliability? We see focus moving from cloud dependency to peer-to-peer distributed networking on-premises. Our platform has a level of redundancy and reliability that some of these other platforms may not have, especially if the cloud goes down -- which it did a few months ago.

In the IoT space, edge computing is becoming more popular. Our particular sweet spot right now is entertainment and interactive facilities like museums, stadiums, hotels, or airports. These types of systems are also being deployed in the Industrial Internet space and in manufacturing, where you see some of the bigger players like GE and Cisco. We do not want to have that element of vendor lock-in, and that is why we have created some open-source tools to get contributors to hop on board and help out, so that we can remain cloud-agnostic as we continue to enhance the product.

CEOCFO: Sounds like you are having a lot of fun!

Mr. Durand: We definitely are.. When you have been working on something for two years that Silicon Valley is calling the next big technology, that validation feels great and reaffirms we have been on the right track with our edge platform development. We are thankful that we have been involved in IoT since before IoT was even a buzzword, and have perfected a human-centered design approach to solving problems. That has given us an upper hand to provide a concrete solution to our clients and really help them think through how they can leverage IoT to enhance their brand, their company, and their consumer engagements. That is exciting to us.

