

Global Outsourced IT Department and Help Desk for Enterprises and Small and Medium Sized Businesses



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CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: Mr. Fakhoury, what is the focus at Framework Communications today?

Mr. Fakhoury: The focus at Framework Communications is ultimately to create a carefree environment where most people really suffer in their business. More specifically, Framework is a world traded IT department. We find that most people have as much anxiety calling the IT help desk as they do going to the dentist. Therefore, Framework is really focused on delivering a carefree IT experience for

small and medium sized business. You will find many times there are ways to get IT to have your IT networks supported if you are a small business owner. One way is to hire the Mom and Pop shop and call them as needed. Sometimes that can be difficult, you do not get the responses you need. Often, they might have a hefty up-front bill and then it becomes an adversarial relationship. Every time something goes bad for the first-time business owner, it is kind of good for the Mom and Pop IT shop. The other option is in-house and hire an IT professional, which can be really, really expensive. Also, it is kind of tough to cover all areas of specialty with the specialization that IT entails.

CEOCFO: What have you figured out to ease the stress that people feel making technology changes?

Mr. Fakhoury: A couple things we have done has been people and client focused. My partners and I, none of us come from IT backgrounds. The source of Framework Communications; the genesis of it, was simply me being a young consultant really frustrated with the poor IT support I would get. I ultimately realized that it really stunk and we could do a better job. Therefore, what we have done better are a couple of things. We have really been focused on data and process to insure clients can have an optimal result. What do I mean? For instance, we boast about three to four minute response times for our clients. We are able to reduce their expenses drastically. Typically, especially for a small or medium sized business, they will find that our fees are about a fraction of what it would cost to just have an internal person there. They also find that you really improve, as opposed to just perhaps fixing their emails or their wireless internet connections. What we have done differently and better is we have been able to empower business to go by using technology more effectively. I always joke with some of our clients, especially during football season, in football, you have offense, defense, and special teams, in business, you have people, process, and technology. Most people and organizations suffer with the last prong of technology to ensure they are getting the most optimal processes on driving clients service better, driving better profits or performance and whether they are empowering their people to be as effective as they can be by utilizing technology. Because of this, we do not think of ourselves as a bunch of email box fixers and wireless network. We make

sure our clients have the support they need, but focus on helping them achieve their forward-thinking goals as opposed to fixing reactive issues.

CEOCFO: *Would you give us a couple of examples? How does your philosophical approach play-out day-to-day when you are talking with customers?*

Mr. Fakhoury: A specific example from within a prominent industry we work with is the healthcare industry. We tend to focus on making their lives much more carefree by not just delivering technology fixes, but understanding how people in hospitals work with technology. One of the things we have done is become a leader on HIPAA compliance. Every healthcare professional in the country is subject to HIPAA compliance. It is a complex set of rules and regulations that go beyond the skills of technology, but certainly impacts the technology. We have devoted the time to develop, not just processes and procedures that are HIPAA compliant, but we have also gone the length to sending recommendations to health and human services, which governs HIPAA compliance. We have helped IT service providers not have to fragment those two things, not have to hire an IT company and hope that they are being HIPAA compliant and then hire a consultant that just focuses on that. We have been able to give them a carefree experience by knowing that their IT service provider is delivering HIPAA compliant solutions. We are doing that in other industries along other regulations as well, such as TCI for anybody that is taking credit cards and storing that information, which is almost any company you can think of. Another of quick example if you like; there is the old adage that we share with our clients, "Hey, would you rather that we fix ninety-five issues for you this month and make sure all ninety-five of them were fixed or would you prefer that we only fixed five issues for you?" The kind of intuitive logic might be, "Yes, we definitely want you to fix all ninety-five." However, what I would prefer is to reduce those ninety-five issues into just five issues and instead of focusing on reactive productivity sapping concerns, we try to focus on what they are trying to achieve as a business and how we can empower them through technology to achieve that. Those are just a couple of differences in how we look at technology as an example.

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CEOCFO: *How do you work with a company to help them focus on what they want to achieve? How can you help them formulate a clear picture?*

Mr. Fakhoury: You brought up such a great example! It is somewhat like going to the doctor. You may go and tell the doctor, "My back really hurts," but you cannot tell the doctor, "I need a cat scan or a bone scan on my C3 and I would like that to be done from a lateral view or horizontal view." You do not know that. Instead, you go to the doctor and you can tell him what the problem is and what a good doctor will do is, by you sharing what the issue is, start to ask a whole series of questions to diagnose what is leading to that issue and what is the cause, which ultimately or hopefully would cure that. I am so glad that you asked that question, Lynn. This is where Framework is able to separate ourselves from our competition. We are not here to reinvent technology. I am not here to make the iPhone in your hand cooler, the computer that you are typing on any better, necessarily. We are here to reinvent how you or our clients work with technology. What we have is sort of the genesis of the word Framework, which is that our Framework and methodology is one that is focused on being really focused on business issues and asking questions that are going to target on the business impact as opposed as to just technology. For example, we have technologies that are not very convenient perhaps or are not optimal, but do not impact the business at all, whereas you might have a technology issue that is causing a lot of business interruptions. For instance, many customer's businesses are using cloud or voice telephone systems. Which leads many times they are running over an internet connection to empower that phone system, but if the internet connection is poor, it is going to cause many business problems. That is because the technology problems or internet connection is causing a larger problem, and the business problem is that their phone service is inadequate and going down all the time, so they are losing a lot of customers because their phones are down and they are not picking up calls from their clients, as an example. Therefore, what we try to do is ask those pertinent questions, much like a doctor would, when you share your back complaint, to insure you are going to get the proper diagnosis and eventually the proper treatment to cure your business. That is what we try to do. We try to hone in on the real issues by asking pertinent discovery questions. We do a lot of analysis on the front end that is technical as well. We have software that we have customized to go on networks to do those health tests. Think of it as the blood test or the bone scan of their environment. We go in and we are there to help them understand, "Your cholesterol is too high" or "you have a fracture in your wrist" or something like that.



CEOCFO: *What do you look for in your people? How do you know when someone you are hiring understands the concept and has the people skills, along with the technical skills, to engage the way Framework wants and the way everybody should want, but so few do?*

Mr. Fakhoury: That is a million-dollar question! As far as the talent acquisition and recruitment strategy, the first thing is that we invest a ton of resource in terms of time and capital in recruiting, training and developing our people. I think this is the biggest core to our success. Everything else works in our business because of our people along with the length and efforts we go to find the best people, attract the best people and ultimately, once they come to work for Framework, insure that we are

supporting them, empowering them, training and developing them in a real significant way. To dive in as an example, Framework for instance has been named, for the last four years now, one of the One Hundred and One Best and Brightest Placed to Work in Chicago. This last year we were named One Hundred and One Best and Brightest Place to Work with in the nation. It is funny because, I was asked in a separate interview, "What are you most proud of among all these achievements," and the truth is, of all the achievements that Framework has been able to humbly achieve; whether it be Inc 500 or any of the other industry awards we have won, the one I am most proud of is our One Hundred and One Best and Brightest Place to Work, because I believe those people believe it is a great place to work. We have been able to attract talent that has led to the type of excellence and execution that has led to those other awards, our fast revenue growth, and all the other service and excellence awards that we have won. Here is what I will tell you, just to put some perspective. I will tell people all the time that this is the toughest part of running a business. Most people think it is acquiring clients or getting the capital they need to just get their operations started or perhaps scaling their business. The toughest part I have found in running businesses is ultimately getting the best people and competing for the best people. Therefore, it has been a focus of mine forever. It has probably been the one task as we scaled as an organization, HR and recruitment specifically, have really been the one area of our business that I have not taken off my plate at all. I do not know if there is a magic bullet, but we have put a lot of effort in training and have built unique programs from our veteran hiring program that we have developed. We have also worked with many non-profits in the Chicago area, in particular to work through organizations like BLUE1647, National Able Network, 1871, and ultimately it gives us an opportunity to source local talent that is getting retrained. Then we have built the training programs to take people from their fundamentals to being excellent technicians and ultimately delivering the Framework excellent service that our clients have been accustomed to. Therefore, a great question, incredible challenge; the toughest part of my job, no doubt!

CEOCFO: *How do you help your clients with security, particularly with helping them understand the importance?*

Mr. Fakhoury: It has become a hot topic now. It is funny, because five years ago, people scoffed at us when we talked about their concern about security. "What are they going to do, steal my credit card information? It does not matter; my credit card refunds all of that money." However, it is deeper than that. One of the trends taking place right now, in technology for instance, you may have heard of, is the "Internet of things." What the "Internet of things" refers to is everyday devices being connected to the Internet and giving us data to make us more intelligent about what might be going on. One of that centers in buildings downtown Chicago to insure they are being properly heated, cooled, insulated, and so on, to the information in your phone that is tracking your health and steps every day to your car and the type of performance you might be getting and so on. There are socks with IOT that talk about your perspiration, blood rate, your speed, and anything you can think of. The major leagues have T-shirts they wear to give them information on the baseball player's swing, speed, distance, and weight load. What is happening, is everything is becoming connected to the Internet. If everything is becoming connected to the Internet, there is becoming way more access points into networks. Think of it as more doors into our house, you must secure those doors more effectively and you have to be more strategic about that. I am limited on what I can share as far as our methodologies on security. What I can tell you is we are taking a

concentrated effort. It was probably about five or six years ago when we really understood the trends that were taking place in security and it is going in a way from, for instance, the issues you might hear of on Target or Sony or the major headline makers, if you will. What you are seeing from security is practical security. Let me give you a quick example of where we have more effective controls and help guide our clients. Referring back to the healthcare example, when clients in the healthcare industry are hit with some type of HIPAA audit or HIPAA compliancy complaint, it is that some Russian or Chinese or North Korean hacker is hacking into their system and stealing patient information to download social security numbers, Medicaid and Medicare information, then selling it fraudulently. Yes, that happens. However, what is more likely to happen, is you have a disgruntled employee that maybe did not get a raise or you maybe let go, but you did not have the proper procedures to lock them out and ensure they did not still have access on the Friday afternoon after you fired them. Now they call and launch a whistle blower complaint, download patient and customer information, and even though you, doctor so and so, who is just running your practice, did not necessarily violate HIPAA or did not necessarily sell all this information on the internet, you are still going to be liable because you did not have the controls in place to protect your client. For instance, one security control our clients are able to enjoy, just as a quick drop in the bucket as an example, is we are able to tell if a healthcare client is putting a thumb drive into the network and taking data off. We will be able to know what machine that was, what was taken off and be able to have an audit trail to trace back to that to ensure no client or patient health information was stolen off of that network. That is just one example. We are in the wild, wild, west as it pertains to internet security. It is not just in relations to the things you are hearing about in relations to our news, elections, and Russian and Chinese hackers. It is really going to have smaller and more impactful things like the example I gave you of just the disgruntled employee stealing some information. Just to answer your question, in closing, this is one of the big methodologies that is really an advantage of being able to work with a company like Framework. The Mom and Pop does not have a lot of the scalability to invest in the tools to ensure you as a smaller company can get the advantage of Frameworks access to all types of cyber security tools. Similarly, if you are going to someone in-house, you are going to have to buy those tools yourself. If you are a small twenty or twenty five, thirty or fifty person office, to spend tens of thousands of dollars on these more sophisticated cyber security tools is out of reach, whereas, if you hire a company like Framework to be able to manage that for you at a reasonable fee per month, in addition to managing all of your other IT and technology infrastructure, and challenges in day to day support aid, you are going to have the advantage of having that cyber security coverage. One last thing to add, there is not silver bullet. If someone has enough time, resource and energy, anything can be hacked. The most sensitive government data bases are hacked. It just takes a lot of effort and time. Therefore, our real methodology to close those holes is to make our clients the least attractive to being hacked. We take the most reasonable, cost effective, and cost pragmatic measures to ensure a lot of the easy things are prevented, just like the disgruntled employee for instance, as well as we show that data, that shows houses who have a security system and publish that, are most likely to be robbed, or clients that are taking the proper protocols. Hackers are lazy. Disgruntled employees are not sophisticated hackers. If you are able to take those controls, many of which we are able to take for our clients, then you are able to prevent and minimize yourself in a drastic way.

CEOCFO: *What is next for Framework Communications?*

Mr. Fakhoury: It is funny, because I think about this all the time, and a lot of what is next is continuing to do what we are already doing; continuing to grow in the healthy way that we have. Having said that; we are obviously cognizant and responsive to market trends. While we are not inventing the next iPad or security appliance, what we are doing is insuring that clients are getting those and using the tools in the most effective ways. As you hit on and we just talked about in a very substantial way, security is going to be a huge, huge play for us and we are going to continue to help clients stay protected and active to ensure their intellectual property is protected, so Chinese hackers and foreign hackers are not stealing their most pertinent protected patents and securities. However, you are also seeing a huge trend in migration to the cloud. Framework has been ahead of the trend on that consideration as well. We are moving and saving our clients a lot of money in terms of not having them buy a lot of capital intensive equipment to build out their office. The cloud is enabling them to be scalable and flexible, and rent as they go, as opposed to buying fifty thousand dollars worth of servers and switches, phones, and computers that are going to get thrown into their office to be obsolete in three years. What they are doing is using applications in the cloud and are using dumb and cheap, inexpensive machines to connect with sophisticated machines in the cloud, now they are able to scale their business as they need to. If they need to scale down their business they can. If they need to grow their business, they can in an effective, non-capital, intensive way. The final thing we are doing is we see a lot of regional expansion on our horizon. Framework has a pretty good presence already within the United States, but we are seeing some more growth within our markets in Texas, DC and even within the Midwest or single out a growth in Indianapolis along with Michigan. Therefore, we will continue to grow regionally in and then we will look at other opportunities that might augment our services such as managed print and expansion continually within voice services as well. That is really what is next for us.