

Virtual Office and Cloud-Based Phone Services for Entrepreneurs and SMBs



Eric Thomas - CEO

CEOCFO: *Mr. Thomas, your site indicates the mission at FreedomVoice is to provide remarkably smart communications to help business do remarkable things. How?*

Mr. Thomas: Our mission from our start has been to give the small guy the “look” of the big guy. Our concept has been to offer virtual office services, to position your company as professional and well established. You may be a great business person and very caring, but if the voice mail on your phone goes to a cell phone or answering machine it’s less professional. That’s what we set out to improve for small businesses.

CEOCFO: *Do you find that most small businesses understand that?*

Mr. Thomas: We have thousands of people signing up every month, so certainly a percentage of them must understand. It is definitely part of the picture. Being able to put your best foot forward is important, along with all of the timesavings. That’s what keeps generating referral business and new customers.

CEOCFO: *Would you tell us about the services that you provide?*

Mr. Thomas: We offer services to two target audiences. We started doing business with the solo entrepreneur and then expanded into the small to mid-sized companies, offering cloud phone services. This service uses VoIP phones that take calls and make calls through the internet. That allows you to put all of the equipment that normally blocks up your office into the cloud. It is less expensive to operate and gives your business a great deal of continuity. If something happens to your office, you can redirect those calls anywhere and your phone system is still answering because it is in the cloud.

CEOCFO: *Many companies offer cloud phone service. What differentiates FreedomVoice?*

Mr. Thomas: There are many companies that offer cloud phone service, but many of them are hosted and not really in the cloud. They are generally a single point of presence with one facility; if it goes, then your service is gone. On the other hand, we have both a San Diego point of presence and another in New Jersey. Our presence on both coasts gives us a distributed aspect, which gives us higher reliability.

The other part of it is that we really are the good guys in telecom. We take care of our customers and do the right thing by them. For example, with the cloud phone services, we offer the services exclusively through partners, because we feel like that is the best experience for the customer. Having a local partner evaluate their premises, their network, and their needs gives the customer the best solution and setup - someone to take care of the details for them. The overall experience is the difference.

CEOCFO: *Open and honest billing is emphasized on your website. How is your billing different?*

Mr. Thomas: Billing is one of the things that causes people concern. Understandable. In telecom, there are often hidden fees. That’s why it’s nice to do business with a company that takes care of them. We created our billing system from the ground up, so that we have control and make things simple and transparent.

CEOCFO: *How do you help smooth the transition from a different system to FreedomVoice?*

Mr. Thomas: The nice thing about it is that we are not installing any new equipment other than the phones so it really comes down to the internet connection. With plenty of high quality bandwidth, you basically setup the phones and the system and test the system to make sure that the customer is happy with all of the things that it does before going live. Once they are happy, they can port their active numbers to our system. The transition ends up being reasonably seamless.

CEOCFO: *You offer a number of features; are there certain service that are overlooked?*

Mr. Thomas: One feature that people tend not to use that surprises me is our transcription service. When a voice mail comes in, we deliver it by email as a wave file that you can play on your computer. It’s nice because it simplifies retrieving

your messages. The transcription service goes one step further and converts voice into text. Now when I get ten messages, I can vet the voicemails in seconds, verses minutes navigating through a phone menu. That is a key value.

CEOCFO: *Do your transcriptions tend to be of higher quality than some of the others?*

Mr. Thomas: It is not perfect, because the cost for perfect would be huge. However, it is better than the others out there.

CEOCFO: *Do many people take advantage of the fax feature?*

Mr. Thomas: Yes. Converging your phone and your fax is more convenient and takes up less space in your business card. Your faxes are delivered by email, so you do not have to worry about losing them because they are electronic, in a PDF file format. Therefore, it is a great deal simpler.

CEOCFO: *You have been getting a fair amount of recognition, CRN's Partner Program Guide, the CRN Channel Chief and Platinum Level of Polycom Choice Partner. Has that been helpful business growth?*

Mr. Thomas: We are excited to receive recognition for our strong partner program. For partners offering this service, it helps them feel confident in our company. For a potential new partner, it helps them evaluate their business partner selection.

"Our customers choose FreedomVoice because of the cost savings... And then, we're the good guys. We care about our customers, our partners, and our community."- Eric Thomas

CEOCFO: *Giving back is important for FreedomVoice. Where do you focus your efforts and why is it important?*

Mr. Thomas: It is sort of the Buddhist philosophy of, "Look at the day of your death for the things you should do with your life." I don't want a legacy of "I made some money." It is just not that important to me. Giving back to the community and helping people do better and live better lives are the things that I care about. We currently have two places that we focus on for our giving-back efforts.

One is Rady Children's Hospital, because they are a local hospital that will not turn anyone away. Plus they really look after their kids with top-notch medical care. There are in the top tier in hospitals in the US with many specialties and parents can take their children there without worrying about cost.

The second one is U-Touch, which is charity that is focused on bringing hope, entrepreneurship and tools to people in Uganda; a war ravaged country, where most of the people are unemployed. U-Touch gives people technology, computer help, internet access and training. We have built a center over there as sort of a business hub to help sustain everything that we are doing and giving people an opportunity to start businesses.

CEOCFO: *What might be different at FreedomVoice a year from now?*

Mr. Thomas: I suspect you will hear about the things that we are doing to help our partners. For instance, we are launching a tool called the Auto Attendant Tool.

From the beginning we have maintained the philosophy that your business is your business. We have never had the philosophy of having just 'one flavor' and fitting your business to it. We determine how our technology can work well with your business. This did put a burden on us for customization. Now customers and partners can do that themselves with the Auto Attendant Tool; giving them a great deal of flexibility. We are giving people the tools to make the changes themselves. We are pushing to give partners more control of their business so they can help their customers most efficiently. That is the biggest thing that will change this year.

CEOCFO: *Put it all together for our readers. Why choose FreedomVoice?*

Mr. Thomas: Our customers choose FreedomVoice because of the cost savings; we combine phone system and phone service into one. The ongoing savings are dramatic. The time savings are dramatic as well but it's usually the second thing that's noticed. And then, we're the good guys. We care about our customers, our partners, and our community.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine

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