

IT Managed Service Provider Offering Support and Consulting for Small and Mid-Sized Businesses in Northern Alberta



Alex Saltman
President

CEOCFO: *Mr. Saltman, front and center on your IT Horizons website shows you people empower their business with technology. How so?*

Mr. Saltman: Technology is ubiquitous these days and a critical business enabler so we work with companies to help manage their environment and make sure that their technologies are in line with their business objectives and to truly help them become more efficient and increase their profitability. We are trying to change the traditional mindset where IT is a necessary evil or cost center. Working with IT is often experienced as a negative relationship where you are experiencing some kind of business or productivity issue and you are being charged for IT support at the same time. We take a much more proactive approach making sure that technology actually helps our customers' businesses become more effective.

CEOCFO: *Are companies turning to you because they understand you operate differently or do you often find surprise at how you are willing to work with them?*

Mr. Saltman: A bit of both. It's one of the common reasons potential customers reach out to us. They might not have had good experiences in the past dealing with IT providers who deliver services hourly where the amount of billable hours is central. When they approach us and they learn about our monthly unlimited support agreements, they are not feeling like they are being nickel and dimed. It is a different experience and very refreshing.

CEOCFO: *Is there a common thread among the companies that turn to you?*

Mr. Saltman: We provide services to all industries and sectors so our customers have a wide range of priorities and needs. However, as a function of our location we find that we have substantial work for oil companies and oilfield service companies operating in Northern Alberta and BC. With the current low price of oil, many of our customers are facing unique business challenges and pressure.

CEOCFO: *When oil is in a decline as currently, does that have a positive or negative influence on IT Horizons?*

Mr. Saltman: There is both positive and negative. On the negative, many companies and customers of ours are re-evaluating and putting certain activities on hold; especially project-based work until such time where the economy is in a better shape or they have better cash flow. At the same time, many of our customers are also looking at becoming more efficient and streamlined so whether that is changing workflows or putting in systems to reduce cost and save time, we also have those types of opportunities that are showing up.

CEOCFO: *When a new client comes to you what is the process in evaluating how you might help them change?*

Mr. Saltman: The first thing we always do is have a discovery meeting to get to know them. We do not subscribe to the idea of simply throwing technology at problems. We really need to understand their business and their objectives to make sure the solutions that we recommend are in-line with that. Once we have had an initial discovery meeting one of the first steps we do is develop an IT strategy plan, which determines in more detail their business goals. We do an analysis of their current environment to lay out where they are right now, where they want to go, and how we get there. Once the strategy plan is complete it provides us a roadmap for delivering IT services that will meet those objectives.

CEOCFO: *When you are talking with a company how do you help them understand what they really need?*

Mr. Saltman: If you approach it from a business perspective rather than a technology perspective, it really helps eliminate some the confusion. Most business owners will really understand what they want to achieve for their business but they might not understand the technology implications. We really try to leave technology and jargon out of the discussion

because it is not particularly valuable and it is not something our customers need to focus on. The point is, IT Horizons lets them focus on growing their business and we take care of the technical details.

CEOCFO: *Would you tell us about the customer service at your organization?*

Mr. Saltman: Service is what we provide. We are committed to providing a responsive, friendly and rapid service. Our staff is skilled and personable. Because we offer managed service agreements, we are able to provide financially backed service level agreements and guarantees. That makes us accountable to our customers to respond quickly and ensures we get the issues resolved. We are invested in making sure we can proactively identify and prevent many issues even before they occur.

CEOCFO: *How are you able to be proactive?*

Mr. Saltman: We have monitoring tools that watch the health of all of our customers' environments: servers, networks, as well as computers. We get alerted and notified if something unusual is occurring. It also enables to determine pending equipment failures and such items as that before they occur. That is all on the automated side. Hands-on, we also perform regular maintenance activities where we are coming onsite on a periodic basis to do walk-throughs and to inspect items and we are proactively maintain and updating servers and network systems so that we can make sure that they stay healthy and in top condition all the time.

CEOCFO: *Do you see less and less onsite as more and more is in the cloud or is there still a lot of equipment that needs attention?*

Mr. Saltman: Typically our customers have a hybrid environment. The cloud is definitely the way that the industry giants such as Microsoft are pushing things and it offers very compelling options for small and medium businesses especially to minimize the capital cost of on-premises systems. With that being said, especially with industry-specific systems, we still see a fair bit of on-premises infrastructure out there. That is a key part of our strategy planning activities: determining which is the best fit whether it is all cloud, on-premises or a combination.

**"We take away all of the negative aspects of IT and allow you to focus on growing your business."
- Alex Saltman**

CEOCFO: *Do many of your clients take advantage of the full range of your services?*

Mr. Saltman: Most of our customers do take advantage of the full range but some customers subscribe to standalone pieces. Regardless, it gives us an opportunity to help identify and make recommendations to them for future opportunities and things that might make them more efficient. There is no absolute requirement the customers need to use us for everything that they do but we often find that it is a good fit if they do so.

CEOCFO: *How do you help with security overall?*

Mr. Saltman: Security is a major concern. We have a managed antivirus service that protects our customers' computers so we are able to monitor and catch anything and respond to it quickly. We also provide proactive maintenance and monitoring for all the security devices like firewalls. We do update and patch management for all of our managed devices where we are installing security updates on a regular basis so everything is kept up to date and in perfect working order. Those activities prevent the vast majority of security vulnerabilities from being exploited. We like to stay on top of security items because they can be a major risk.

CEOCFO: *Do you find many customers coming to you before they implement solutions?*

Mr. Saltman: For existing customers we are very proactive and after working with us and essentially being their trusted IT department, they realize that if we are involved at a certain level in the strategy and the decision-making process of their business, that we can be more effective and it works out really well. When we come across new leads and opportunities for new customers, often it is because they are experiencing some kind of problem already and that is more often reactive. Once we have had a chance to establish a relationship and show a customer what we can do it turns proactive very quickly.

CEOCFO: *How do people find you and how do you do outreach for new customers?*

Mr. Saltman: We are partnered with Saltmedia, which is a website development and online marketing agency. Therefore, we are aggressively pursuing online marketing and search engine optimization to get leads from our website. In addition to that, we are big proponents of word of mouth and referral marketing. We are actively involved in business networking

groups in our community to establish relationships. We also have a small amount of print media but these days we are focusing more on the online marketing.

CEOCFO: *What, if anything, has changed in the company and the approach over time?*

Mr. Saltman: Before my partners and I started IT Horizons, I worked as a senior IT consultant for many years. I concluded that there are too many problems with the traditional break/fix hourly model for IT support. It is a negative relationship overall. You are working with clients when they are in a stressful situation when something is down or not working so you are really behind the ball to begin with. You are dealing with customers when they are unhappy and that puts a lot of stress on the relationship between the provider and the customer. On top of that, there is always pressure within the company to maximize billable hours. Sometimes you are doing critical work but sometimes it just seems that you are finding work to do or the focus switches from customer to customer as the opportunity for billing shifts around. The managed service paradigm changes all that; the focus is not on maximizing billable hours, not only going to work when things are broken, but rather it is trying to prevent those sorts of issues affecting our customers to begin with and making sure that their businesses are as effective as they can be.

CEOCFO: *How is business?*

Mr. Saltman: Business is good. Even with the industry downturn in the oilfield, there are still many opportunities out there. Oilfield companies are making sure that they are investing in technology in the right ways to remain efficient and competitive. Because IT services offer support to essentially any organization whether it is a not-for-profit or a professional services company like lawyers or accounting offices or a small mom and pop shop, we really have opportunities across the board and that helps us stay insulated from the ups and downs in the economy. 2015 was a good year and 2016 is looking to be even better.

CEOCFO: *How do you stay on top of changing technology?*

Mr. Saltman: Technology is constantly in flux. That is one of the biggest challenges of our job, and it is one of the things for me that is the most appealing. The way that we manage that is to embrace it. We are very purposeful and particular when we are hiring and recruiting. We are looking for people that are keen on learning and improving their skill set. Our people are our most valuable asset by far. Therefore, by choosing those people who are always improving their skills and widening their horizons we are able to stay on top of the constant changes in our industry.

CEOCFO: *Why choose IT Horizons?*

Mr. Saltman: We take away all of the negative aspects of IT and allow you to focus on growing your business. We provide a positive and nurturing relationship where we become your trusted advisers and part of your team. The value of our service agreements is superb and our pro-active approach to IT service delivery is simply the best.

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



**For more information visit:
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