

Q&A with Deana Pizzo, CEO of IT Solutions of South Florida, Inc. an Outsourced IT Management Company and Co-Managed IT Provider offering Cloud IT, Network Managed Services and Security Solutions for Small to Medium Sized Businesses throughout South Florida



Deana Pizzo
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Interview conducted by:
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CEOCFO: Ms. Pizzo, what is the focus at IT Solutions of South Florida, Inc today?

Ms. Pizzo: We are an outsourced IT management company and co-managed IT provider. For the co-managed, that means that we provide checks and balances and KPIs to organizations that have internal IT staff. We let the business owner know how to measure and know what their staff is doing.

CEOCFO: How did you get into that aspect, which is over and above just managing and helping?

Ms. Pizzo: It was something that we saw a need for a lot. We would go into organizations and they would say, "I do not need your services, I have an IT staff." Then on the flip side I get called in to, let us say, we would walk into organizations that had an IT staff and we would see antiquated networks. Therefore yes, they had someone on staff that could fix what many times would be a printer problem or something funky that often times a reboot would fix. However, we found that internal IT departments were often not sharpening the sword and continuing education. We say, all of the time, someone internal on IT that would almost just put it together with a hope that no one will blow on it or that it does not break. That is because they got it to work, but they do not know how they got it to work! We just saw that all the time and we realized in talking to other business owners that they knew how to run their company and they knew the KPIs on how to run their company, but they had no idea how to put the KPIs to measure an IT department and we do that all day long. That is what I do for my business. Therefore, I brought how I run my business into other organizations.

CEOCFO: What types of companies are using your services; size, geography, industry?

Ms. Pizzo: As far as size, we find organizations that have somewhere between twenty five to one hundred and fifty employees that are kind of our sweet spot. They are big enough to have someone on staff, but they are not a whole enterprise solution, usually. As far as industry, we are anything from manufacturing to construction to general business.

CEOCFO: Would you tell us about your range of services and how you interact with a company? What is the routine as you are looking at what they are doing from a regular technology area and from your specialized area?

Ms. Pizzo: As the market and the needs fit in business right now, security is one of the biggest factors. Not everyone always needs co-managed IT. Those are kind of those rare cases of just something that I kept seeing. However, security is always a big issue for organizations with a CryptoLocker or any type of a ransomware that is coming in. We did just receive the designation of the top twenty security providers in the US. We do a lot of, not only putting layered security in a network from the gateway level to the firewall level to the end user level, but we take it as far as we do education. That is because right now the biggest vulnerability in organizations is people! No matter how much technology I put in there, I cannot "technology" people. Therefore, we do a lot of education for anybody who is our client, who is one of our managed clients. We do a lot of education theories. This year we are rolling out twelve different topics and we spend a month really focusing on end user education and doing "how to identify spoof emails" and "how to know when to click on something" and "what to look for, for a phishing scam". That seems to be the biggest trend that we see; the education for the end

users in how to identify something that could lock up your whole system. Backups are the other big thing; security is a big thing this year, but then backup is the other big thing. However, behind that we preach backups that secure offsite backups in the cloud. Everyone things, "A hurricane is not going to take down my building and the probability is not very high, even though we live in the South Florida market." Therefore, it is educating that it is not only a hurricane. It could be fire. It could be theft. It could be an employee; an employee more than anything. Therefore, putting backups and secure offsite backups is the second biggest thing that we are doing.

CEOCFO: *How do you monitor that employees are not falling back into their old habits? Are you able to continuously monitor so that if you see some activity you might want to alert the company?*

Ms. Pizzo: Yes. Part of the core of what we do that is not the big fun, sexy part that we talk about, is that we are always managing and monitoring every work station, every server and every end point in that network, as far as looking for some drastic changes, looking at the overall health, looking at the patches and making sure that everyone is secure and that we have put the layers in there that could catch ninety percent of what his going on. We do a monthly newsletter. We do quarterly sit downs with our clients. We do phishing attempts. We will actually go in a do phish threats and spoof. We will say to the business owner, "Give me ten people in your company, give me your C level people; let us go ahead and test them and see if they click on something." Every business owner says, "Oh no, they are not going to click. We talk about it all the time and we have a policy." Then we will do a spoof threat in there and about half of the people will click on it. Then we follow that up with one on one or some group session, like a "lunch and learn" and some training on what to be suspicious of.

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CEOCFO: *Would you tell us a little bit about how you support your clients and proactively prevent some problems? How are you able to get your clients to understand they should not do a quick update themselves, such as the Microsoft updates, but let you look at it first?*

Ms. Pizzo: As far as the Microsoft updates; Microsoft likes to put everything out there along with their own marketing and advertising, which is why you need to upgrade to Microsoft Edge right now. They are pretty spiffy about that one at this current time. We have conversations with our clients and we let them know that we do not rule out everything. We white and black list and we only update what you need. We make it so that they know that they know; and actually the whole staff, not just the owner and not just out technical point of contact, but the whole organization knows that we are handling the patches and the updates on the back end that they need, everything from Microsoft to Adobe to Java; anything. We are handling that. We have remote monitoring agents on all of the devices that we support and through that we are doing the updates overnight. We will let them know, "Over this weekend we are going to be doing a round of updates. Please make sure you have saved and closed everything, because Saturday at midnight your computer will be rebooting or your server will be rebooting. We just talk about it a lot. One of the things that we like to say that makes us different than just "Joe Schmo IT" is communication. Communication is what is so lacking in the industry. Therefore, the relationship and the communication are an area that we work really hard on to make us different than every IT shop.

CEOCFO: *What do you look for in your people over and above the technical skills? Can you tell if someone understands the level of communication you want with your clients and how to speak with your clients frankly?*

Ms. Pizzo: Yes. When are looking for new candidates to hire, first we will get resumes and we will look them to see if they look interesting. After that everyone starts with a phone conversation. The most important thing is, "Can they talk to people." I firmly believe that you can teach tech and you can improve tech, but you cannot teach personality. Therefore, I cannot have people on the staff that only know "geek speak". They have to be able to talk to people. Therefore, we start with the phone interview and see if they can just talk to us on the phone. We talk to them for about fifteen minutes and we try not to talk about tech. Then after that we will bring someone in for another interview and we will meet with them for about half an hour. Again, we are just looking for them to talk. We are looking to see how they interact. That is the most important thing. About eighty five percent of everything that we as a managed service provider do is on the phone. Therefore, I have to make sure that people can speak to people and not just throw up technology terms all over them.

CEOCFO: *What has changed in your approach over time?*

Ms. Pizzo: Emphasis on relationships, emphasis with our clients that we want to be part of your team. I do not ever just want to be an expense. I want to be part of your company when you guys are having big board level decisions. Let us be there. Let us be the technology branch of your organization. Let us make this relationship stronger by trust.

CEOCFO: *Would you tell us a little bit more about how you monitor and what you will present to a company or maybe to the people you are monitoring in terms of KPI, in terms of taking care of what needs to be and be an example of what you might find and how you would direct a company?*

Ms. Pizzo: The biggest thing, out of the gate, is documentation. Part of the reason why we really dove into this part of the offering is that we would see business owners who felt that the IT person that they have on staff had the keys to the castle. Business owners felt that they had no power when it came to their technology, yet they had people on staff. The biggest thing that we constantly see missing is documentation and saying, "We fixed this problem" or that they have addressed the same problem for a sixth time and all they are doing is band aiding and band aiding. They are not fixing the root cause. I like to think that I bring in a team of technology experts to fix the problem, rather than band aiding. Then for me, I believe heavily in educating and continually educating my staff, so that we know the newest things are coming out. Then, when I go into an organization and number one, they do not have documentation, we see a sticky note, all the time, with passwords on it; even from the internal IT guy! It is crazy! Then we see a lot of experimenting with non-best practices software going on in companies. We can clearly tell, as IT experts, that this person was just playing with a new technology. They did not do the research to see if it is a great technology, is a right software solution or is it the best for the business. It is like they are always playing on someone's network when it is an organizations livelihood. However, they are not sharpening their sword. They are not doing what we would do as far as evaluating all the different resources available and evaluating the "why" for an organization.

CEOCFO: *What are you surprised that we cannot do yet with technology? What are you surprised that we can do?*

Ms. Pizzo: I have never really thought about that. What I am surprised that we can do is that technology from phishing has gotten so smart that the lack of education or the error from one person can cripple an entire business. I have smart, smart clients; often times a CFO, that will get an email and they will click on something wrong and they Weill say, "I should have known better! You guys have talked about it; I should have known better." I am just surprised all the time that one person can take down that whole network. I am fortunate that we put the layers in that we can fix this, but still, I have seen multi million dollar companies loose amazing amounts of data and loose thousands upon thousands of dollars over a week or two because of something like a click in the wrong place.

CEOCFO: *How do you reach out to potential new clients? How do people find you if they are looking?*

Ms. Pizzo: We put a lot of effort into our SEO in our local demographics. We do a lot of community involvement; anywhere from sitting on some boards of some non profits, plugging in with our local chamber, plugging in with some local networking groups and then we do a lot of referral campaigns with our current clients. "Hey, you say you love us, who can you share this with?" Our industry is a "when you need it" industry. That means that someone is not going to change their IT provider just because they like me or they like someone in my organization. They only change when they have a need or a problem. Therefore, it is very important that we try to stay top of mind when that moment arrives. Therefore, through community involvement, through some association involvement, with like an AGC, which is Associated General Contractors, or a manufacturing association, we have to do out part to be out there when the need arises.

CEOCFO: *What is ahead for IT Solutions of South Florida?*

Ms. Pizzo: Strengthening our relationships and strengthening our education. As a CEO I see that as a really big differentiator. I do not ever want any of our clients or any end user to feel like, "Oh no, I have got to call IT." I want it to be, "These are my problem solvers, I want to call them, they get it done." I do see more growth in the co-managed IT and reaching those business owners who feel trapped. That again, is only because I see it so often from peers. Therefore, focusing more on that managed IT and that co-managed IT that I see the technology industry and the MSP industry transitioning more to a management company. Microsoft is taking so much more in house with 365 and so many technologies are going to the cloud that I feel businesses need help managing that relationship with all of their different offerings. They feel over their head. Therefore, let us come in and manage your technology relationships and manage your solutions and train your people. I see us becoming more of a management company.

