

Integrated Technology and Communication Solutions for Business Processes

Business Services Technology

Information Systems Intelligence
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Ryam Leestma
CEO

Company Profile:

ISI is a small, family-owned business that has built a solid reputation on providing excellent service and expertise. ISI has an excellent staff of engineers and support personnel who hold some of the most prestigious industry-standard degrees and certifications. ISI is a Microsoft Silver Certified Partner, Microsoft Small Business Specialist, Cisco Premier Certified Partner, and Dell Premier Partner.

Interview conducted by:
Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor
CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: Mr. Leestma, what is the concept at Information Systems Intelligence LLC?

Mr. Leestma: ISI provides integrated technology and communication

solutions that leverage the language of the Internet.

CEOCFO: What kinds of services are you providing?

Mr. Leestma: We provide all the technology and communications tools that an organization needs to support its business processes. That includes VoIP calls, computers, servers, storage, backup, switches, wireless and security. We offer a very extensive portfolio of products and services.

CEOCFO: When people first come to you, are they looking for that full solution and are they aware that you offer a soup to nuts approach?

Mr. Leestma: Everybody needs everything that we offer, but the difference is that the market has not produced very many players that differentiate themselves by providing the full stacked solution. There is the convenience factor and there are the economies of scale on the costing side and vendor management side. There are a lot of advantages to having that, and very few organizations go out looking for that because it is so unusual. Once many organizations begin to engage us in a particular area, they see the value of those economies of scale and continue to engage us in other areas.

CEOCFO: Do you start smaller with some of your companies before taking on the full range?

Mr. Leestma: Yes, it is not possible for us to take over the entire account on day one. Usually we will start with a small area and then blend over into other areas as a lot of these systems are tied together by design.

CEOCFO: Is there a common thread for your customers as far as a particular type of business, size or industry?

Mr. Leestma: We have been very successful in local government and education. I would say the rest is mid-market commercial and various small businesses.

CEOCFO: There are certainly challenges working with government and education. What do you understand about the process of working with these entities that puts you a step ahead?

Mr. Leestma: We have a couple of coveted state contracts that definitely help streamline the purchasing process.

CEOCFO: How do you ensure the high quality of service, and how do you find the right people who have both the technical and people skills needed?

Mr. Leestma: How do you ensure quality control? That is a very difficult question because the reality is that a lot of times you have one person who is engaged with the client and they are working alone as a consultant. The key is that you need to try to find people who have high moral standards, who will accurately reflect the values of our organization, which is highly service-oriented. Frankly, that is more important than finding someone with technical skills because we can teach the technical skills. We can send people away for training on the technical skills, but you cannot teach someone to be a good person or be a service-oriented individual. That is the most difficult part of any hiring practice – finding people who are going to align with the culture.

CEOFO: When you are interviewing somebody, how do you know that he or she is a good fit?

Mr. Leestma: We use extensive interviewing. In all of my interviews, I tell them that they are going to represent ISI out in the marketplace, and there is not going to be anybody that is going to watch their every move, what they say, or what they do. They are representing us as a company and it is very important that they have high standards in moral conduct. As such, I need to know their personal standards in moral conduct and where they come from. I get various responses, and based on those responses I make my decision on who I am going to hire.

CEOFO: Are there services that you are not currently offering but you would like to add?

Mr. Leestma: I think we are in a pretty good position. Every now and then, I get some requests for application development or more customized ERP work, but we generally subcontract that work out right now. We are more associated with infrastructure, consulting services, and operations management.

CEOFO: How do you evaluate new technologies and new offerings?

Mr. Leestma: We are approached all the time with different ideas and different solutions that are out there, and what we look for is synergies with our existing products and services. Very few things are done in a revolutionary way in the modern day. The cadence of innovation over the past ten years and especially the last five is incremental improvements. We make an incremental improvement and we rush it to market to try to capture the innovation margin associated with the improvement and we then go back to create another incremental improvement. A good example would be the iPhone or Cirrus airplanes. They have come out with multiple generations of the aircraft and they could have waited until they got everything absolutely perfect but then they would have bypassed all of the market profit incentive between their possible available first generation product and

the products that are available today. If we are constantly making incremental improvements, that is the pace of innovation. Then, when innovation is introduced, we should be able to tie back those improvements to themes that have previously been introduced in the market. If we do that, we can see a strong correlate between what has already been done, and we have the confidence that it is not going to be something that is going to die quickly. If we can see the immediate business operational or capital benefit of the investment as compared to more legacy ideas, then we find that the idea has business merit as well. There is a process that goes into it but it is process-driven.

CEOFO: What is your geographic reach today?

Mr. Leestma: The state of Michigan.

CEOFO: Do you do much on site?

Mr. Leestma: Yes, we do a lot of work

“What sets us apart is our focus on an integrated solution and complete life-cycle management of an organization’s systems.”— Ryam Leestma

on site. I would say that 50% of our work is done remotely and 50% of our work is done on site.

CEOFO: Do you find that your customers value that because it is not so common anymore?

Mr. Leestma: Yes, some of our customers do. It just depends on the culture of the customer. Some customers love video phones and teleworking while others hate them, so it really depends on the culture of the organization. The key in a custom consulting business like IT is that you have to work with your customer to develop the solution that they are looking for.

CEOFO: How do you reach potential customers?

Mr. Leestma: We get a lot of word of mouth business. We do have some marketing efforts like conferences, shows and events, but we have been very fortunate that we get a lot of word of mouth business.

CEOFO: What is ahead for the company?

Mr. Leestma: I would say continued expansion, continued incremental evolution of our vision and our offerings, and continuing to work on creating happy customers, happy employees, and profitability.

CEOFO: Do you have any concerns about the overall economy regarding some of the changes that are going on or is that not a big factor for your business?

Mr. Leestma: I think it is a factor. If you look at what has happened at the national level politically, there is a lot of uncertainty and it is hampering capital investment. That is a problem. I think that people are willing to do it, but the thing that is holding us back is that there is an entitlement disposition that is developing within our country. It is preventing employers from finding the employees that they need in order to scale their business. There is more

cash sitting on the sidelines because of the employee shortages, not because there are people who cannot be found, but because people are not willing to do the jobs. For instance, I talked to a trucking company last week. They said the highest they could get was 85% utilization on their fleet. I asked why that was and they said it was because they could not hire truck drivers. Nobody wants to be a truck driver anymore. They said they were paying people \$80,000-\$100,000 a year to sit in a seat and drive a truck, but they cannot get them to do it unless they give them a brand new \$.5 million truck. That to me is an absolutely absurd scenario. People complain about employment and there are jobs available, but some people just do not want those jobs. That is hampering capital investment. The entitlement that I feel our country has developed over the past five or ten years is directly hampering the job recovery since the recession of 2008. I had a conversation with a multi-state drywall supplier and I asked what their number one struggle was that they had in their business. They said it was that nobody wants to do drywall work anymore. Nobody wants to hang drywall

because they are all too good for it. That is the same kind of scenario where we have an entitlement society that has developed over the past 20-30 years. If they cannot get the job that they want, they do not see the purpose in working in a job at all, and I think that is a major problem that hampers capital investment in this

country. There is money there. A spread is occurring between the top 1% and the middle class. The top 1% is running out of things to spend their money on, and the middle class do not want to do the jobs that are being provided. That money is not going to go down into the middle or lower class

because they do not want to do the work.

CEO CFO: Why pay attention to Information Systems Intelligence LLC?

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