



Consultants and Products that Support and Enhance Salesforce.com and Infor CRM



Elaine Koyama
CEO

Interlinx Associates, LLC

CEOCFO: *Ms. Koyama, according to your site, Interlinx is linking companies to their customers. How are you doing that?*

Ms. Koyama: We support and enhance Salesforce.com and Infor CRM (Saleslogix). We have been implementation partners in the CRM customer relationship management space for over fifteen years. What customer relationship management applications do is automate the sales, marketing, customer service and support function. It allows companies to efficiently identify their customers, stay engaged with their customers and better understand their customers' needs to improve service. That's how we link companies to customers.

CEOCFO: *What areas are you able to improve upon in Salesforce?*

Ms. Koyama: What we do is take the basic application of Salesforce and we work with the client to understand their business so we can automate, streamline, and improve their business processes.

CEOCFO: *Would you give us an example?*

Ms. Koyama: For example, Pricing is an area that we do quite a bit of work in. Often times a company will have to pull information from multiple spreadsheets in order to come up with a price. There might be transportation costs, packaging costs, for as in bag bulk and small pallets. We will take all those inputs and help automate the process so it optimizes the pricing and it can reduce the errors humans can make.

CEOCFO: *Are all of your implementations customized?*

Ms. Koyama: We like to recommend starting with out-of-the-box functionality so that people start using the application. Once they start using it, we like to stay engaged so that we can help them identify areas that they can gain efficiency. Often times what happens in an implementation is someone tries to do it themselves, they do not know what the product will do and they will implement it and that is all they will do. They may have an automated rolodex so you can look up phone numbers, you can see their addresses and see the contacts associated with an account but what they do not know is that next step. They get comfortable using the tool and they do not look outside of what they are doing. They may have a sense that they are not fully utilizing it but they do not know what they do not know and that is where we come in as a partner to help them identify what else the application that they are paying for can do for them. They answer is yes and no; we start with basic implementations but for companies to utilize and maximize the value of the application, we help them see other areas that they can improve on.

CEOCFO: *Were your industries of focus a deliberate strategy or opportunistic?*

Ms. Koyama: About a year ago, I had an epiphany driving through Iowa. Not a lot of people have epiphanies driving through Iowa. As I was driving, I was thinking well we do manufacturing and we have done implementations in manufacturing, we have done business in process, transportation and warehousing so we have done lots of different kinds of implementations. A common thread through all those implementations was that they were in agriculture. As far as from one end of the spectrum where it was companies that sell fertilizer, seed and herbicides to farmers, all the way to the other end of risk management. They were hedging commodities and playing that financial market. We spanned so many different industries but the common thread throughout is that the preponderance of our clients are in agri-business. We do focus on business to business so we are not dealing with the farmer but we deal with the people who work with farmers and the supply chain involved there. It was a conscious decision to deal with agriculture. The other area we have is nonprofit. I like giving back and I feel that it is all of our responsibility to do some of that so we have a discounted rate that we provide to nonprofits. Even in the nonprofit space, we tend to stay on the nonprofits that do more on the B2B. One of

our clients makes plastic boxes so they hire disabled people to work in that section but they are selling those boxes to businesses so it is another B2B kind of environment.

CEOCFO: *Recently Interlink was certified as a women-owned business in Minnesota. Why was that important for you and how will this affect your strategy going forward?*

Ms. Koyama: We are actually a minority and women-owned business. I was certified first as a minority-owned business. I was testing the waters. We do a lot of business with Cargill, which is a Fortune 500 kind of agri-business firm. One day I was in making a sales call and I saw a brochure on the table where they supported the efforts in the minority and women-owned businesses. I thought our business qualifies so I certified on the minority side first and just recently expanded that to the women-owned. Why is it important? We do not do a lot of government work. Does it get me more business? It does not, no one has given me more business because I am a women or a minority. It goes to that nonprofit side, I believe that it is important to support other women and other people of color that are trying to make their way in the world. I am on the older side of my career so I feel like I can mentor people if the opportunity arises. I am in a position where I can give women or people of color opportunities, which I have been trying to do. Last summer one of our interns was a woman who returned to college after raising a family. She was majoring in mathematics and computer science. She filled one of our intern positions as a grandmother. My other intern was a 22-year-old young man from Iowa State. They get to sit together, bounce ideas off of each other; both of them brought a lot of interesting perspective into our company. I feel like participating is as much supporting other businesses as it is gaining anything from a business perspective.

“Our business thrived because we see ourselves more as business consultants that support a sales application. Our business went from upgrades to enhancement. We take things that we are doing on spreadsheets and automate those processes and reduce the risk of human error. We have based our business on being good consultants that are able to connect loose ends and make them better for people.” - Elaine Koyama

CEOCFO: *Are companies coming to you before they implement Salesforce?*

Ms. Koyama: I wish they came to us first because many times what happens is we get pulled in because it is a sales implementation or they have spent a tremendous amount of money on something that is not working so they think they need some help. We have Salesforce in-house and we have reminders to reach out to people. Much of our business is add-on business. Because we have been in the CRM business for fifteen or twenty years, a lot of our revenue was on upgrades. You would have ACT! Version 1 and then you would have to upgrade to Version 2. With Salesforce in the cloud applications, you do not have upgrades. Many of the people in our industry are out of business because they were not business consultants but technical consultants. Our business thrived because we see ourselves more as business consultants that support a sales application. Our business went from upgrades to enhancement. We take things that we are doing on spreadsheets and automate those processes and reduce the risk of human error. We have based our business on being good consultants that are able to connect loose ends and make them better for people.

CEOCFO: *What is your geographic range?*

Ms. Koyama: We are upper Midwest in Minnesota. We do business in Canada, Europe. I have done training the Pacific Rim area but our core business is domestic. Because we focus on agri-business, it is the Midwest area.

CEOCFO: *How is business these days?*

Ms. Koyama: If you had asked me a year ago, business was booming. We felt a slowdown at the end of this year 2015. We had a lot of deals in the pipeline from the summer and people were hesitant about going forward. I do not know if that is a trend. The pipeline is looking good again the first quarter of 2016. I was surprised because we were coming off a boom year in 2014. My targets for 2015 were much stronger. I was thinking we were coming out of the recession strong and the fact that we lived through the recession I think is a testament to something. I think the economy is still a little tentative. The gas prices have really hurt us here in the Midwest because the Bakken oil range in North Dakota was huge for this area. It impacted the entire US. Gas prices have plummeted and oil prices have plummeted so that side of the business has slowed significantly. That impacts agriculture too. The cup is half-full.

CEOCFO: *Your enthusiasm is clear. Why do you enjoy doing what you are doing and why should people pay attention to Interlinx?*

Ms. Koyama: I like running my own show. While it is stressful, some of us thrive on the challenge. I think I thrive on problem solving. Through the recession I looked at every opportunity of what is the worst case and what is the best case, or likely path. Through the recession, the worst case is we have to fold or abandon the house and move out in the middle of the night, which a lot of people did. The best case is you keep plugging along and do the right things and business will

come and we were lucky that did happen. I will give credit to Gina my marketing person. She made me think about how I approached things. There was a book out fifteen years ago called Blue Ocean Strategy. You look for places where nobody is. When I was in high school I was athletic and I thought I could do the 100-yard dash but all the girls were doing the 100-yard dash and there are some fast people. I was pretty fast but not that fast. Nobody was doing the shot put in discus. I was a strong farm girl and I thought I could do the shot discus, nobody is there and not many girls wanted to do that, they all wanted to run. I went to the shot put and discus and did well at that because there were not many people there; it was a blue ocean. I look at that agriculture sector and nobody is focused on agriculture in this CRM space. I see a big opportunity there because I grew up on a farm and worked for Cargill for twenty years, I did that management track back in the day when there were no women doing those kinds of things. I do think that part of the reason I am doing well is we are still plowing a lot of new ground and there is still a lot of work to be done in making breakthroughs and opportunities available.

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



Interlinx Associates
Linking Companies to their Customers

Interlinx Associates, LLC
For more information visit:
www.interlinxassociates.com

Contact:
Elaine Koyama
952-829-1313
ekoyama@interlinxassociates.com