

A National Provider of Consultative and Infrastructure Management Services, Network Management Group Inc. Emphasizes Computer Networking, Business Continuity and Technology Services for Small and Midsize Businesses

**Technology
Consulting**

Network Management Group Inc.
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**Steven B. Harper
CEO**

BIO: Experience: Has been in computer reselling management since 1981; Served on the Board of Directors of: American Red Cross, Reno County United Way, Kanza Council - Boy Scouts of America, and the Greater Hutchinson Chamber of Commerce and currently on the advisory board for Commerce Bank and Trust Company; Delivers presentations and seminars on the use of technology and its affect on people; Manages the vendor contacts for NMGI with companies like: IBM, VMWare, Ingram Micro, Hew-

lett-Packard, Eaton, Xerox, Cisco, Microsoft, Citrix, GFI, Dell, Synnex and others. Past Experience: Spent 9 years in commercial banking as an officer in the operations, marketing, customer service, and finally the commercial loan division; Became a certified SBA commercial lender for the local bank now known as Bank of America as a result of mergers in that industry; and BBA – Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas (1973).

About

Network Management Group Inc.:

NMGI is a national provider of consultative services with an emphasis on computer networking, business continuity, and technology services for small and midsize businesses and organizations located throughout the United States. We design, implement, and manage business technology solutions for our clients. Founded in 1984, NMGI is headquartered in Hutchinson, Kansas.

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

CEOCFO: Mr. Harper, the tag line on your website is, "People and Technology Working for You." What does the company do?

Mr. Harper: We provide consultative and infrastructure management services, primarily utilizing computer networking and business continuity services for small and medium sized businesses, communitybanks and CPA firms from coast to coast.

CEOCFO: Why those particular areas? Was it opportunistic?

Mr. Harper: I have been in this business for over thirty years. I went to college to be a banker. I knew banking intimately when we got into the computer business. My partner is a technologist. He has spoken and trained CPAs on technology for twenty-five plus years now. Therefore, we pretty much of became experts in those two areas of just providing IT services to those two industries.

CEOCFO: What are some of the misconceptions that people in that group have and that you are able to dispel so that they are ready to make a leap?

Mr. Harper: I think that today many people are hearing the phrase, "I need to be in the cloud and that technology is getting easier to use." All of those things are probably correct to some degree. The bottom line is that most all IT problems occur "between the seat and the keyboard". It is our job to help manage the way people want to use technology and be sure that it is secure in the way that they do use it.

CEOCFO: What are some of the common areas that you work on with your clients? What are some of the situations you address that people might be surprised that you can do in a useful way?

Mr. Harper: We make money by solving people's problems in the way that they use technology; let us be honest, these operating systems from Microsoft, the use of virtualization software, and more vertical applications all make support more complex and of course we just happen to have a team of engineers that are Microsoft trained and Hewlett Packard trained by the vendors on how the technology really

works. Then it is blending the way people want to use technology. Our main job is still protecting the data and the integrity of the business that it is tied to.

CEOCFO: Would you give us a concrete example of what you might work with for a banker or a CPA?

Mr. Harper: Our typical client is a CPA firm of ten to seventy-five people, they have a desktop, they probably have a laptop, they might have a tablet and they might have a smartphone. They want access to their email, to their data and they want to be able to work on multiple monitors. We manage their IT, "Information Technology", over the internet. We manage their back office, if you will, in making sure that the application software that they want to run; their tax software, their scanning software, their document software or their accounting software, and that they work seamlessly so that they can access it from their desktop, their tablets and their laptops if they are in the field doing an audit. They just want it to be non-problematic.

CEOCFO: Are there many companies that specialize in the segment that you are in?

Mr. Harper: I think that there are certainly hundreds, if not thousands, worldwide who attempt to do a portion of what we do. None of them have the comprehensive vertical approach we have to the marketplace. The legal name of our company is Network Management Group, Inc. Therefore, we go by NMGI. For all these years, even before the internet, we were managing networks. We were providing network services; security services and IT support services. The internet though, has allowed us to become more global and far reaching in the way that we can service clients. That has allowed us to manage the IT for a firm in Boston and one in Honolulu from right here in Hutchinson, Kansas and we do. Twenty plus years ago that would have been very, very difficult without the advent of the tools that we have today as well as the internet.

CEOCFO: You have access to over one hundred eighty five thousand

products and four hundred eighty different vendors. How is it possible to know what is right when there is such a large choice? What have you figured out to be able to get just the right fit for your clients?

Mr. Harper: We have really focused on becoming "best of breed" with a few key vendors. Therefore, we are Microsoft Gold, Hewlett Packard Gold, SonicWALL Gold and VMWare enterprise certified. We have aligned ourselves with some of the key product vendors in the industry. That said; there are many best of breed vendors in the market place and many of our clients want to use those vendors. That is because they have an affinity for the way their product works and we learn and try to support them as best we can.

CEOCFO: How do you reach potential clients?

Mr. Harper: My partner Randy Johns-

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- Steven B. Harper**

ton, who is also a co-owner of NMGI, travels the globe providing seminars and speaking at industry and trade conferences as a key note speaker; because he is an expert in the field. Many of the people who hear Randy speak then want to engage our firm to deliver some of the solutions that he talks about. Therefore, a good sixty to seventy percent of our leads come just from him being in front of people, talking to people and that sort of thing. The rest of our leads come from vendor supplied leads and our own internally generated leads and referrals.

CEOCFO: You updated your website a couple of months back. What is available there now that might not have been before? How is that helping your potential clients?

Mr. Harper: One of the things in the top right portion; we put a support button; I think it is an orange button. It talks about how they can click on remote support or they can get direct

client access. This has allowed us to more quickly provide support services. Time to resolution is very important. We measure metrics in our business. On our website, over on the right you will see a little button that says Statistics. We even publish a statistic that talks about our average response time and our total proactive responses and how many tickets we are working and so on. Our goal is to respond to every service ticket in less than ten minutes. I noticed today that it says two minutes. Typically, it is less than five. People like to know that when they call a live person will answer the phone and you actually get to talk to a live person who is there to solve your problem. As I said, that is what they want and that is how we make money.

CEOCFO: Are many of your clients taking advantage of the full range of services?

Mr. Harper: I would say yes. The people that come to NMGI want to go to a company where; there is a, "A single throat to choke". They want someone to help design what they need; help them procure the hardware that they need, configure the hardware that they need, and then continue to make it work and provide what we said it would do on an

ongoing basis. Therefore, we are a "womb to tomb" provider, if you will, of those kinds of IT services. In addition, we offer the security, the email management, the accounting services, as well as web and media services that give them the whole package.

CEOCFO: Are there any services that you would like to add to the mix or tweaks that you are working on?

Mr. Harper: What we have really added in the last year is what we call our Media Services, which is our web development team. They help people leverage the internet and get more tightly integrated with their customers; whether they bring them in through or portal or whatever and also to give them digital signage opportunities. Such as in our lobby, we have a welcoming sign that has the latest news, weather and sports, welcoming people that might be visiting our firm today. It feeds content to people that are wait-

ing to see us. We are now feeding that content to everything from retirement homes to local government buildings, as well as CPA firms and banks. It ties digital signage, your web and what you do and just gives them another marketing tool to market their business. They like the fact that an IT company will handle that for them. Over the years, one of the reasons that we are still in business is that we continue to “morph” our business. Back in the 1980s people would walk through the door and want to buy an IBM PC and Excel spreadsheet or WordStar and do word processing and spreadsheeting. Now, it has just gone so much farther beyond that. That is why we just continue to add the services that we do.

CEO CFO: What is the key to knowing which of the new technologies and new ideas that comes out every day; what might stick and what is a flash in the pan?

Mr. Harper: I think you have to take a “ready, aim, ready, ready, aim, ready, fire” approach to it, so that you do not just “ready, fire, aim” at something or you will take on a lot of technologies and a lot of vendors that do not provide the proper solution for your clients. “First to market” is not always the best choice. It is important that we have a secure, well funded company that is behind the technology that we are going to offer to our clients and that, in my world, is channel friendly. Over the years we have not sold much Dell product, because they wanted to sell direct to the end user and we wanted to maintain that client relationship. Therefore, we did not sell much Dell.

CEO CFO: You do work with service providers and the public sector as well.

Where do you see growth? Where would you like to see growth? How do you get that to happen?

Mr. Harper: I see growth in a couple of areas. One of the areas is, what we call, “business continuity and disaster planning.” A disaster discussion is not “what” disaster, but “when”. Everyone in their lifetime, whether it is going to be a flood or fire or hail or in our world tornadoes out here in Kansas; “are you prepared”. Does your business have a plan? It is not just “is your data is secure”, but if you have a plan have you tested the plan. The problem with that is, many of those things for most business are a “nice to have”. Things like a “have to have” are “I need anti-virus on my PC, I need an email management product, I need an anti-spam product. However, I do not have to have a business continuity plan.” Consequently, we like selling those, but it is sometimes hard for people to give us the time or the money to help them develop that plan. Therefore, that is a big growth area. However, it is certainly a hard sale. The next piece that is growing rapidly and we feel that we are positioned to handle is what is called the “hybrid cloud”, where there is a server in house as well as things in the cloud that are used by people. Maybe their exchange mail is hosted in the cloud and their data is hosted locally. That is what we are experts at and that is where the majority of our business and revenue comes from today.

CEO CFO: How is business these days?

Mr. Harper: Business is “off the charts” great. We have been blessed; primarily because we are working with industries that are doing well right now. The

financial sectors and the professional services sectors have been growing well. They understand the need for utilizing technology to hold their cost down. That is because; at the end of the day we are all in the “people” business. Our big costs in our business are our people. If we can make them more productive, more efficient and more effective by using technology we can control our costs and thus have greater profits in our business.

CEO CFO: Why should investors and people in the business community pay attention to Network Management Group? What sets you apart?

Mr. Harper: What sets us apart is that we have a very seasoned management team. We have deep roots with our vendors. We have won many, many industry awards and are constantly selected for our quality of work and our customer satisfaction. As the CEO of the company it makes me proud to say that not only do I feel lucky, but I feel blessed to lead the people and serve the clients that we server. You talk about the investment community and I think it is important that people understand that there are many misconceptions about our industry; that people just want to sell products and move on. It is important to find, not just a trusted advisor or an IT provider, but find some company that wants to treat you like an IT partner and that they are invested in your business and understands your business and how you make money. Because we take the time to do that, that has really helped our company grow. That would be my parting thought.



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