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Providing a Virtual CISO with Every Engagement, Defensible Technology Aims to Be the Trusted IT and Cybersecurity Advisors for Small and Mid-Sized Markets

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Defensible Technology

Interview conducted by:
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CEOCFO: Mr. Doty, what is Defensible Technology?

Mr. Doty: We are an IT and cybersecurity consulting company. We aim to be trusted advisors to the small and mid-sized market, and I would define that as organizations anywhere from 100 or so employees upwards to 1000 to 2000 employees.

CEOCFO: I see on your site "We are not your average services provider," what is different at Defensible?

Mr. Doty: What has happened in the managed services space is that many of the managed services providers are traditionally rooted in the IT side of the business and the past number of years with cyber security becoming more prevalent among businesses, a lot of the managed services providers have made their way into the cyber services security world. We come at the market from a different direction where we are rooted in cyber security and integrate IT into what we do.

We bring expertise that many managed service providers do not have, and more specifically we have experience in responding to data breaches and leading compromise and forensic investigations. This is not typical in the market place for most managed service providers.

CEOCFO: Do many companies or potential customers understand the difference or are they happy to find out about your approach?

Mr. Doty: I started the business five or so years ago predominantly doing assessments and advisory work. We found that we were making recommendations to customers on things they needed to do to optimize the environment or enhance their cyber security posture. Oftentimes the implementation of our recommendations would be picked up by a third party or a traditional managed services provider.

What I found in the marketplace, especially in that smaller to mid-market is that the customers do not necessarily differentiate between cyber security and IT. They desire the one-stop shop. As we have grown the business, that is what drove us to bring in the IT component, so as I have described us as being rooted in cyber security, that is how we started. The requests from our customers have brought in the IT component so that we can be that one-stop-shop.

CEOCFO: Are there particular industries of focus for you?

Mr. Doty: Yes and no. We pretty much have a customer in most industries though we have clusters of focus which include a strong footprint with non-profits and higher education and SaaS technology or software businesses. The smaller colleges and universities tend to be good candidates looking to outsource cyber security and the kind of things that we offer from a managed services perspective.

CEO CFO: *Is there one offering or customized offerings; how do you interact with your customers?*

Mr. Doty: We have few packages or bundles. However, we are very flexible and one of the things we pride ourselves on is we try to right-size the cyber security and IT approach for different businesses. Obviously, budget and those kind of factors come into play quite significantly.

What we do is lead every one of our engagements with a virtual CISO, which helps provide some executive leadership, to help find that right fit and that right balance to which components of an IT and cyber security package are a must have, which ones are highly recommended and which ones would be nice to have. Therefore, we have a lot of flexibility to build a custom subscription into a package. In addition, to supply the sales and market side of things we do have that classic gold, silver, bronze side of approach to our offerings.

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CEO CFO: *When you are looking to take on a new client, what might you look at about their situation that less knowledgeable people don't recognize as meaningful?*

Mr. Doty: There are a lot of organizations, especially on the cyber security side, that are simply trying to check the box, so it appears they are doing the right thing from a cyber security perspective. We do have a company or two that will take that approach, so we have to take an educational mindset with them to change their thinking a bit. However, our better fit customers, those that fit with the branding of Defensible Technology, is where they need to be cyber security serious, and need to make changes to their IT environment. Those customers really engage in that journey and the goals of that journey could be delivered quickly or it could take several years to accomplish.

For an ideal customer, what is written in their cyber security policy, which defines what they say they are going to do from an operational perspective; we help them walk the walk to actually do what they say they are going to do. Then if they have to describe to their customers, or a cyber insurance provider, or some external regulatory or compliance body that they are doing the things they need to do to be safe and secure, they will be able to.

If a customer has a wide variance in what you say in your written documentation and what you actually do, they can become a risky client for us because you are not in a defensible position, and things like your policy can become weaponized against you if you did have a significant data breach. Therefore, in the onboarding process, we try to really get an understanding as to where the customer's mindset is, because we take on some risk as well in managing a customer's IT and cyber security environment, if they are not willing to follow their policy. It does not mean they have to implement every recommendation, but they have to be engaged in the conversation and move the ball in the right direction.

CEO CFO: *How do you navigate the area of explaining to a potential customer what they need to do, hat they should without coming across as pushy sales people?*

Mr. Doty: It is really about taking risk-based mindset and educating the customer goes a long way, as opposed to selling. One of the things I will say to a customer is that they can outsource the management of their IT and cyber security, but you cannot outsource your risk. You own that as the business, and that is true in the enterprise Fortune 500 world where the IT and cyber security functions are internal to the organization. Therefore, if something significant were to happen, there are reputational and financial risk, and loss.

We try to take that mindset and drive the conversation with the prospect to help them understand their tolerance level for risk. If they currently have a high tolerance for risk, we could then recommend lowering that and solutions that would enable them to get there. It is taking that risk-based mindset and drive the conversation at that level helps to not come across as trying to push a product or a sale.

CEOCFO: *What is your geographic reach today?*

Mr. Doty: We are headquartered in New York City, and 50 to 60% of our clients are in the Northeast. The other remaining percentage are spread around the country. We are not currently doing any international or global business, but we do have customers that are nationwide.

CEOCFO: *Do you find a difference in working with New Yorkers? Are there regional differences among your clients?*

Mr. Doty: In New York, for financial services customers, there is a distinction between the way operate and think about these things, as opposed to a nonprofit company. There seems to be more of an industry disparity in terms of their approach, and less about geographic divide.

CEOCFO: *Do you do much outreach today; what is your growth plan strategy?*

Mr. Doty: I brought on someone to build the sales and marketing engine earlier this year. Up until that point most of our growth was driven by existing contacts, networks and referrals. We are in the process of formalizing our sales and marketing approach. We have started to do outbound email campaigns and some LinkedIn marketing stuff. We have also tinkered with Google and Facebook click advertising.

Approaching 2025, from a planning perspective, we are considering putting some dollars from a financial and capital side of things, but these are rooted on the cyber security, IT and fraud component. I have just started the process of looking for a small IT, managed service provider that may be a strategic partner or some sort of a merger. We are looking at those things and building out a more formal, sales and marketing approach.

CEOCFO: *What is new in cyber security; both threats and solutions?*

Mr. Doty: One of the big emerging things is AI (Artificial Intelligence). Then with ChatGPT coming to the world, it sort of changes the game on a number of different fronts. On the defensive side of the cyber security equation, AI is used quite heavily in the tools that enable the defending team to operate quicker, more effectively and efficiently. It has also affected the offensive side of things, as the cyber criminals now have access to tools that they can use to accelerate their capabilities. One of the classic examples, if you think of a phishing email, historically many of the phishing emails could be identified by misspellings or poor language. Now with ChatGPT and AI, they can improve the language and become a lot more clever in the way that they execute phishing campaigns.

It's a mix bag and companies have to decide what they are going to allow employees to do. I have seen situations where employees are trying to do the right things and be more efficient, but they have now uploaded sensitive information into a cloud based AI platform. This leaves them open to potential data loss. That is an emerging area that will continue to evolve, so it is something we will keep an eye on.

CEOCFO: *Finally, you are in a crowded industry with lots of companies trying to provide services. Why choose Defensible Technology; what sets the company apart?*

Mr. Doty: We take a very white glove approach to the way we deliver services. We take pride in working with a clients team, so that they do not feel like they are working with a third party provider or service provider, and we are really embedded into their operation. Even simple little things where we set up a Slack Channel or the Microsoft Teams channel with direct access to all of our employees with our customers so that you do not have to place a phone call, send an email or open a ticket. This allows customers to get in touch with us in real-time, although not necessarily 24/7, but we really try to be at the clients beckon call and bring that being an extended team to life. We couple that with highly skilled technical skills in our delivery team.

My team is rooted in service in the enterprise and we try to bring that experience to the small business and do it in an affordable way.

