Open Technologies

IT service provider values customer interaction in solving computer-data problems

by Christopher Cussat

STRATEGY TO SHARE

CUSTOMER & EMPLOYEE RETENTION

Keep your customer's best interests as the focus of the company. Interact well with your customers and employees. Hire people who are focused on succeeding and not just on making money.

LOOKING AHEAD...

OT's immediate goal is to continue looking for opportunities that have short- and long-term benefits for its vertical markets. OT operates in a number of different vertical markets, like higher education, healthcare, and the commercial realm. Given the right opportunity, it is also always looking to offer its services to a wider geographic area.

Dan Merry, president of Open Technologies (OT), found that his path to IT services was longer and more indirect than he imagined. Beginning his formal education in veterinary medicine, Merry quickly determined that he needed to find a different profession. After several business starts and stops, at age 40, he completely started over. Merry worked in corporate sales for an IT company, and he recalls, "I was actually the only sales person in this remote office, and the company was doing mostly operating-systems training."

merits for their organization. "To put it simply, we always ask, 'Will our solution have the correct ROI for our customer to make the investment?'" Merry says. "Today, more than ever, our customers are interested in hearing about solutions that have a proven ROI."

Merry believes that OT's competitive edge is a result of keeping its customers' best interests as the focus of the company. "I can truthfully state that we have never allowed a customer to be compromised by a solution that we helped create," he says. "I always wanted to be able to

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Dan Merry, President

Three months after Merry began working in IT, one of the partners called to inform him that his office was closing in 30 days. Merry and his coworker decided to buy the desks and chairs and continue on with the business themselves. "That partnership lasted about 10 months before my partner moved to Minneapolis," he explains. In 1994, Merry formed OT at its current headquarters in Des Moines, Iowa. Since then, Merry has continued to build the business, which now actively operates in five Midwest states.

OT takes a horizontal approach to the IT industry through its focus on specific programs and systems, such as SUN Microsystems. The company provides and supports SUN Microsystems' Oracle database servers, high-performance systems that utilize SUN Microsystems' hardware and software and that are used by universities to solve complex problems. It also focuses on high-performance storage products created by both Hitachi Data Systems and SUN's Open Storage product line. "We made the decision early in our corporate life to stay focused on particular product sets," Merry says. "We also offer a complete lifecycle view for our customers."

In other words, OT uses its clients' current refresh cycles to help them determine which solution has the best

go back to any and all of our customers and have a clear conscience." Merry feels that OT's collective reputation is why the company is in business today, and that this will also ensure its success in the future.

Merry considers interactions with customers and employees to be the single most important factor in the success of his company. "We understand that, without our customers and their continued satisfaction with our products and services, we would have no business," he says. In addition, he adds that hiring people who are focused on succeeding and not just on making money is also key. "We have always held that if you do the right things and treat people as you would like to be treated, the income or remuneration will follow," he says.

Helping people and companies solve computer-data problems is a daily reminder to Merry that he is where he wants to be. "I enjoy seeing the benefits that our solutions can bring to an organization," he says. "In some cases, it is speed in processing information, return on investment, securing the data, and, in general, helping people be more productive. We don't try to be all things to all people—we have determined that focus and competency are most important." [P]