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Pulse Technology – growth in their Office Supplies and Furniture Business has benefited their Managed Print and IT Services



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"It is not always about making money. It is about having a relationship with an organization that is give-and-take, like a partnership." Chip Miceli

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CEOCFO: *Mr. Miceli, what is the overall vision behind Pulse Technology and what is your focus right now?* **Mr. Miceli:** The vision is to get back to 2019 numbers. We took a hit in 2020 and 2021, so our goal is to get back to where we were in 2019. Our growth pattern today is looking at IT and software solutions for our continued growth.

CEOCFO: *Looking at your site I see you are involved in lots of areas - furniture, office products, print management, and network services. Why such a wide scope?*

Mr. Miceli: I ended up in the furniture and supply business because I bought a company in Indiana with the thought that we would be able to sell their customers technology, which has worked out well. Our growth in office supplies and furniture has just blossomed and our profit has gone in that same direction.

I keep an eye on everything that we do and for now, we are making money across the board. However, if we do not make money in something, I usually dump it.

CEOCFO: *Are you finding it difficult to get personnel; how are you dealing with the challenges that everyone is facing?*

Mr. Miceli: We face the challenges like everyone else; we have run ads, we have used Indeed, and recruiting agencies. It has been a struggle, especially in Illinois for some reason. We are just struggling trying to find people there. In Indiana I am a little bit more fortunate, as more people are looking for opportunities, so we have been luckier there. It seems when I lose a person, I have another immediately to replace them.

CEOCFO: *Would you tell us a little bit about the managed print services, which is not something you hear a lot about anymore?*

Mr. Miceli: Well a lot of people think that print is dead. I think if you look at it that way, it is dead. We are finding more opportunities for us in that arena because companies have given up on selling it. Customers have given up on it because they did not feel it was a value-add to them and then when we sit down to talk to them about it we seem to bring back the value-ad. People are printing less so for us we must find new opportunities.

Because of the IT staff being short in a lot of bigger organizations, they do not have the IT guys anymore to fix the printers. Therefore, they call upon us to do that and that is where our growth has been. We have current customers where we have had copiers and now, we are taking over their printers because their IT people do not have time to service them anymore because they are short-handed.

I do not see where it is dead, we are always going to print somehow and some way. Even when we convert people over to document management or put them on a product that will curtail their printing, they still print. When you start saving documents today, you are asking yourself where you saved it.

CEOCFO: *What is new in the office product scenario; what is new in managed IT services? What are some of the things you are providing today that maybe were not even available in 2019?*

Mr. Miceli: More cybersecurity. We are installing more programs around the firewalls. We use a product called WatchGuard™ and that has been working very well for us. We are finding that more people are worried about their environment being hacked, so they call upon us to strengthen that and usually it comes first with the firewall and then cybersecurity.

We have been doing some testing; not a lot at the moment, but I think that will be a place of growth because people are going to have to always check themselves out a couple times a year to make sure they have no holes in their environment that can be hacked. I think that is one of our areas of growth for part of the future for our industry that we can handle.

CEOCFO: *Are you surprised there is still not a good way to be safe?*

Mr. Miceli: If they are going to hack you, they are going to find a way to hack you. They do it by hook or by crook. They will send an email to you and say here is a coupon from your local store, you then open it. You really cannot stop that; we teach our customers about it. We send phish out, we send these types of things out to the customers to see who is going to open them and then we go talk to those individuals and ask them why they opened it. These are the things we are trying to prevent. It is a hard job but you have to keep doing it otherwise they are going to keep hacking you.

CEOCFO: *How many people are taking advantage of overall managed IT services today, or is a still a lot of what you do break-fix or piecemeal?*

Mr. Miceli: We do all managed services but we do not do any break-fix anymore. We do projects, we get a lot of that today because everybody seems to be upgrading their computers and their servers or going to the cloud or virtual servers. With all that stuff on their plate, it gives us a lot of opportunity to grow our managed services.

CEOCFO: *Do people appreciate the history of Pulse Technology; does it matter to potential customers these days?*

Mr. Miceli: It does some. It all depends on the area. I would imagine Chicagoland not having a lot of loyalty, but in the outskirts of the area there is. In Indiana there seems to be a lot of loyalty, they give us a lot of opportunity, for example, if we make a mistake, they allow us to fix it. We are all going to make mistakes. We are not perfect. That is all you can really ask for from them.

CEOCFO: *Are you looking at more acquisitions or is it more if something comes your way?*

Mr. Miceli: I do not look for them, they usually find me. If someone is looking to sell, they usually find me and ask me my advice and if there is something in the area where I want to be, then we discuss doing acquisitions. I have not done an acquisition for quite a few years.

CEOCFO: *Core Values on your site include Grit, Synergy, Integrity, Accountability, Innovative, and Personal Enrichment. Would you tell us a little about a few of those and what makes those things important for you?*

Mr. Miceli: They are all important to us because we want to be a company that someone feels they are getting a fair deal as well as great service. Integrity is especially important to us. I do not want a sales team or a service team telling accounts things that we cannot do or do poorly, I would rather walk away from it. Integrity is something that we want to instill in everybody who works here to make sure we can be a trusted advisor for our customers.

CEOCFO: *How have you learned over the years to be that trusted advisor, to offer goods and services that really will help, without seeming like a pushy salesperson?*

Mr. Miceli: I am probably the worst one to say I am a pushy salesman. I have always been an individual who presents the facts, the reasons, and the solutions. When I am done giving a solution, 99% of the time you are going to buy it from me because it is a unique solution for you. I have always been that way ever since I got into sales. Just what are your issues, let us see if I can help you.

I have helped people with stuff that had nothing to do with my business, it was just to help them so they stay in business. I had a guy call me up and say "hey, you guys here fixing my machine, it looks like you fried it, something is wrong with the power, just send me out a new one." I asked him if he wanted a price and he said "oh no, I trust you."

CEO CFO: *Would you give us an example of how you might craft a solution for one of your clients and a couple of examples of what you might come up with that might be a little outside the box or might show you are going over and above what people normally would suggest or do?*

Mr. Miceli: Usually if I am involved in a sale and mostly now days it is all IT, but the first thing I tell the group of people, and I usually am talking to a group, I tell them "here is what we are going to find out in this meeting, I am going to tell you what I know about you and you are going to tell me what I do not know, and by the time we are done with this meeting you are going to decide whether I am the person to go forward with and I am going to decide if you could be a client that we are going to be able to help."

After I hear all the issues that they have, I try to say "ok we can do this this way and that way, and we can fix this by doing this." I ask whether it sounds like a viable solution to them and if so, we move forward or they can walk away and look for another opportunity. I am all about if I cannot do your job 100% then there is no way I am going to want you as a client because I do not want to have to let you go down the road and tell you we cannot do this anymore because we took on something we did not understand.

The toughest part about IT is understanding the problems. A lot of times the people that you are talking to do not even understand the problems until we are in there looking at everything and finding out what is going on with their system. We just took down one that we did not realize that the hard-drive on their main server was not partitioned correctly. We had to repartition everything to break it up so they would have a faster scenario and more storage capabilities. For some reason we did not see that in our assessment until we started playing with it.

CEO CFO: *What are you surprised we can do with technology today and what are you surprised we have not figured out yet?*

Mr. Miceli: I do not think anything surprises me anymore. If someone puts their mind to it they can just make it happen. In my younger days I used to be a programmer and I would sit down and figure out a program and make it work. I do not do that anymore. The interesting part is that I think technologies can do anything if someone wants to write a program for it and design a product.

CEO CFO: *What have you learned over time about how to work with your customers and employees?*

Mr. Miceli: When I was a younger person, I was quick to judge and quick to answer. I talked over people and finished their sentences and I learned that did not get me far. I learned very quickly to have more patience and that I do have two ears and one mouth and I should listen before I speak. That is what made me better at my job. I do that with everything that I do, I like to hear all sides of everything and then I figure out if a solution can be made and if we can be part of it.

CEO CFO: *There are many companies providing lots of services, why choose Pulse Technology?*

Mr. Miceli: I imagine if you asked all the people that worked for me, they would all have a different answer. We really care about our customers. A lot of our customers found that out through the pandemic as they were struggling with paying their bills and not having enough people because they were home with COVID or whatever, we were there for them. We delayed their payments, we helped with payments. We did whatever we could to keep them in business. Through the pandemic we did lose a lot of customers because they just finally closed. The ones that reached out to us for help, we were able to help and that is what we are about.

If a customer is struggling, we are here to help you wherever we can so that they can continue to grow their business and do well. I think the people that are our current customers seem to know that. We have signed-up a lot of new customers lately who have heard from other customers that we are a caring organization.

We care about the success of our customers and because of that, we get more opportunities and clients. It is not always about making money. It is about having a relationship with an organization that is give-and-take, like a partnership. If I can help you great, hopefully one day you can help me.

