

CompTIA®



Spotlight on Success

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Steve Ross



“In order to remain competitive and successful, we will constantly need to adapt and keep looking at every client in their own way to understand their individual needs.”

From Calculations to Cloud – Shackleton’s Journey to Success

CompTIA talks to Steve Ross, MD of Scottish MSP Shackleton Technologies, about his journey from accounting to IT and how the journey to successful service provider has required time, investment and focus on the customer.

CompTIA: Can you provide some background on you and the company?

Steve: I don't come from a typical IT background and started out in the financial sector as an analyst, working for some big names including GlaxoSmithKline and Accenture, which at the time played to my strengths. I also worked for many smaller companies as financial controller, which gives you great insight into everything – cash flow, sales, people and also how bad things can get.

I always had a desire to be in control of myself and wanted my own business. In 2004, I could see the emerging importance and role that technology would play in the future, and, after some soul searching, set up Shackleton Technologies.

At first, we predominately focused on support and selling hardware, but as time went on we saw the need to get more involved with clients at a strategic business level, and help guide them to utilise technology to empower the business rather than [going with a] reactive help desk model.

CompTIA: What made you want to work in the IT channel?

Steve: As mentioned, I am not from a straight-forward IT background. Through my job as an analyst, I began to see the pivotal role that IT was playing in business, especially analytics. I always had a love of computing and electronics and it was through this that I took a leap of faith and joined the IT community and have never looked back.

CompTIA: On your website, you pay homage to the great explorer and adventurer Shackleton. Does this reflect the company spirit and ethos?

Steve: Indeed, I think at Shackleton we embrace adventure and the spirit of teamwork. All expeditions are reliant on the individual skills being applied to the team to get results and we embrace that. Our journey is still ongoing and by finding individuals with the right talents to help navigate and the right personality and spirit to join in with the company ethos we too will achieve great things.

CompTIA: If you could take the business anywhere on an adventure, where would it be?

Steve: Probably to the U.S. I like the way they do business and are very upbeat. The U.S. is also the proving ground for new tech and innovation with everything seemingly starting out there and arriving with us years later.



CompTIA: What has been the biggest adventure or challenge you have faced on your journey so far?

Steve: I think one of our biggest challenges is when we started to expand. It is sometimes difficult to know the right time and way to invest.

As a small team, we were reaching the point where we were getting stretched and deep down knew that we needed to take on additional staff. However, this is an expensive thing to do and we had to dig deep and take a risk and ensure that we didn't throw the financials out by doing so.

For me it was also not just about looking at figures. If we took on a member of staff and it didn't work out it would not just be the business affected, it would also affect a person, their career and their family. We therefore had to be very informed about how any increase in headcount would affect us and how we could ensure that they were utilised and delivering a return on investment.

As time goes by you get more experience in these matters, and know what to look for when making these decisions. Luckily for us everything has worked out well and we have continued to grow and be successful.

CompTIA: On the flipside, what do you see as your biggest achievement?

Steve: Our biggest achievement was opening a second office. When setting up the business you just want to survive and be able to pay the bills. When you get to a point where you can celebrate a new office, you know you have done something right.

CompTIA: Many IT providers are trying to migrate to become a strategic partner rather than IT suppliers. You have been successful in this. What advice would you give others?

Steve: When starting out, we primarily sold hardware, but quickly noticed that the industry was changing and we had to change with it. Now, 60 percent of our business is services or selling time, which brings its own challenges. We also place far more importance on understanding our clients and work with them to help guide and shape technology based on desired business outcomes.

This takes time and effort, but there a few simple things can help:

1. Spend time to understand your customer and their objectives and future plans.
2. Understand what they need – not what you want to sell them.
3. Spend time – a lot of time – preferably face-to-face to create solid, long-lasting relationships.

CompTIA: With the emergence of cloud and self-selection, the industry has been changing. Have you had to adapt your business in any way?

Steve: As an MSP, you must accept the fact that you will need to adapt and this brings its own challenges. We have to get the right blend of skills now to be able to identify needs. We also need to morph from the techie to the business consultant with technology expertise, which adds additional layers to the required skill-set.





For us and many like us, this journey isn't over and to be honest in order to remain competitive and successful we will constantly need to adapt and keep looking at every client in their own way to understand their individual needs.

CompTIA: What does the future look like for Shackleton Technologies?

Steve: We are currently in a great position with a large and solid client base across many different verticals, However, things can change very quickly and the threats we face from competitors and factors such as cyber-threats are increasing.

At Shackleton, we will be investing in remaining at the top of our game. This will require ongoing education and review of our own objectives, but more so the needs of our clients. Whatever happens, it is sure to be an incredible journey.

