CompTIA

Spotlight on Success

David Peach

Making workplaces great with audio, web, and video conferencing

Lifesize connects organisations with conferencing technology, integrating plug-and-play HD camera systems, HD phones, and easy-to-use cloud-based conferencing software.

David Peach, regional director, ANZ, Lifesize, discusses how the company differentiates itself in a crowded marketplace, and how a perfect storm of market drivers has worked in its favour.

CompTIA: Can you provide an overview of the business?

David: Lifesize is a global cloud video and collaboration service sold by subscription via our network of partners. We were formed in 2003 as a video conferencing provider. Before moving into the cloud, we made on-premise infrastructure.

Our original founder, Craig Molloy, sold the company to Logitech in 2009, before returning two years ago and transforming the business into a cloud subscription service, and exiting the on-premise hardware business. . Late last year our transformation was completed when several VC's purchased the business from Logitech.

Our software operates on multiple devices and, by connecting into a cloud-based service, companies have access to a cost-effective, dependable, and scalable solution.

We operate in more than 100 countries, and have 3,500 customers globally, with hundreds of customers in Australia.

CompTIA: What are your current challenges?

David: We operate in a rapidly changing market, so we need to be agile. New opportunities, and threats, frequently pop up, so we need to alter and adjust our technology and business model to adapt. At the same time, because we are a 100 per cent channel vendor, we also need to maintain a degree of predictability so that our business partners can plan what they're doing, remain aligned with us, and grow alongside us. So, essentially, there is a fine balance between needing to respond and accelerate versus the need to also be somewhat predictable, and that can be challenging at times.

We have lost some partners along the way because the change in our business model didn't suit them. The key was to be upfront about what we're doing. We telegraphed our move to the cloud for a year. Some partners adapted, while for others it didn't make sense. Lifesize needed to identify and work with new set of partners who are comfortable working in the cloud model that's becoming more prevalent. It's always a challenge to invest in the right

business relationships but that is ultimately how we will all grow.

The other challenge is that we operate in a crowded market space with new technology and new vendors popping up regularly. We do, however, have key areas of differentiation, so we strive to ensure that we present that as best we can.

CompTIA: What current opportunities do you see in the market?

David: It's like a perfect storm for us right now. The market and technology has moved to the spot that we already occupy. We moved in this direction early and it is paying off.

The way the modern workplace demands workers to be always connected and available also plays to our strengths. Employees are more willing to be available but in return they expect to have flexibility in work hours, work spaces, and work locations. They don't necessarily want to go into an office every day but they do want to be productive wherever they are, and they want technology to support this. This is one of our biggest growth drivers, as organisations are looking to create an environment where they can offer such flexibility.

Businesses are increasingly gaining a global footprint. Their own office network, and those of their suppliers and customers, tend not to be located within a half-hour drive of each other, yet everyone is focused on reducing costs and travel, while still broadening the footprint of where their business operates. This is a key driver of online meetings, which is where we come in.

To address these needs, a lot of employers have cobbled together solutions using a few technologies: one for audio; a different one for video; and another for web conferencing. This means employees have to remember three different login processes.

Companies need to consolidate and converge into one platform. The trend is very much towards ease of use and consolidating technologies, and that is what we offer.

The availability of public cloud infrastructure is also driving conferencing costs down and is in turn driving market growth at a rapid pace.

We are working rapidly to making an already-intuitive service even more so, letting employees seamlessly change from one type of meeting to another, depending on what best suits their needs at the time.

We let customers record meetings, play them back, and send as links for other people to view. Live broadcasting to many hundreds or thousands of participants is another option our customers will benefit from. However it's not just meetings - training videos or even audio instructions can be created on the fly, then made available to whoever needs them from our cloud.

We make it easier to connect people in a meeting room with people who are anywhere, and on any device. Lots of providers struggle with that. Some require everyone to be on a certain type of service. Ours is standards-based, so we interoperate with every provider that's standards-based, while uniquely offering our own deeply integrated Icon cameras for meeting rooms.

CompTIA: What successes have you had over the last 12 months?

David: The main one has been the transition from being a 100 per cent on-premise hardware manufacturer to becoming a 100 per cent cloud-delivered software service. Our CEO once described our prior reliance on-premise technology as "posing an existential threat to the business". It was a big year for us doing that transition and discontinuing all those hardware products, so it's hard to look beyond that as being the stand out, particularly given how well we've come out the other side.

Stopping a business and starting a new one can have a dramatic impact on revenue. We now have a different revenue model and have undergone a top-to-bottom transformation. Coming through all that and emerging with a brilliant and dependable service, and having good partners, some traditional and some new, who are building an ongoing revenue stream: that's the biggest success.

More than 20 partners of ours sold their first ever cloud subscription contract by selling Lifesize. That's 20 partners who are moving their business to the cloud, which is a significant leap for them, as they are now on their way to building a recurring revenue stream for their business. We have brought them on board with us. A large proportion of them would never have thought about selling collaboration solutions, thinking it was too technologically advanced or was not their core strength, but now they can talk to customers and easily set them up, which has opened up a new revenue stream for them.

CompTIA: What are Lifesize's plans for the future?

David: Over the next six months, we will release many new features that improve the solution, so the customer will find it easier to blend our tech into their employees' everyday lives. We also want to make it easier to access all of the existing available features. We have come a long way but there are still a lot of things that we want to do.

We will also make it easier for new customers to adopt and deploy our solution.

Another big focus for us in the next six months is to improve our partner program so it's totally aligned to where our business is as a cloud vendor. This will help our partners to increase their profitability and make it easier to represent us.

CompTIA: What advice do you offer others?

David: You can't wait to pull together a perfect plan for your business, and you can't spend months doing market analysis and research and consulting everyone twice before deciding what to do. The industry is moving too fast. You have to have a clear and consistent overall objective and repeat it regularly to all of your stakeholders to let them know where you're heading. In terms of how to get there, you need to make a start and keep going in the right direction. Make changes as you need to, but set a direction and go for it. It's as simple and straightforward as that.

If you communicate well, no one can say you've surprised them by going in a particular direction. If, on the other hand, you spend forever trying to decide which direction to head in, you'll miss the market opportunity. Don't wait for the perfect plan. Start with strong

objectives and begin the journey, but be flexible enough to adapt along the way.

CompTIA: What you get out of CompTIA membership?

David: I have been pleasantly surprised by it. A diverse group of people have come together to discuss, debate, and network, but there's no real agenda of pushing a particular piece of tech or service. Likeminded people are leaving their egos at the door and talking about topics that are important to all of us.