CompTIA

Spotlight on Success

May 2016

Karl Sice

Staples Technology Solutions puts the customer first for business success

CompTIA: Can you provide an overview of the business?

KS: Staples Technology Solutions is an IT solutions implementation specialist. A subsidiary of multinational office supplies retailer, Staples, since 2008, Staples Technology Solutions was previously known as Corporate Express, one of the largest suppliers technology products to government and private enterprises in Australia.

Staples' technology business in Australia currently employs about 135 people, and is growing. Staples Technology Solutions offers a range of solutions to Australian businesses and government organisations, including technology products, management print services, and data centre management.

CompTIA: What sets the company apart from its competitors?

KS: Staples Technology Solutions has an extensive reach in Australia. We have a presence in a number of regional areas throughout Australia, and this is really sets us apart from most other local players, as it gives us more face-to-face engagement with our customers, no matter where they are.

Not only do we have the backing of an international company, Corporate Express already had a long history and broad reach prior to being acquired by Staples. This combination puts us in a position to grow our reach even further for greater customer service.

We always make an effort to meet our customers in person, no matter where they may be. We're often able to garner vocal and active engagement from our community of customers around Australia. This continuous engagement, in which we put our customers first, also helps us to differentiate from many of our competitors.

CompTIA: Who are your typical customers?

KS: Staples Technology Solutions has a rich history with large corporate and government customers. Over the past few years, however, we've also moved into the middle-market, where we're servicing customers with 100 workers or fewer.

The middle-market is currently one of our biggest growth areas. Many medium-sized businesses want the same IT capability as the large players, even though they can't muster the same resources. With the range of services and solutions available today, this is a largely achievable aim.

The deployment of cloud-based solutions, for example, is much easier and more widespread now than it used to be, and this kind of offering is enabling smaller businesses without a lot of internal resources to match some of the IT might of their larger rivals. This is where we are seeing a lot of growth, and most of that is in the mid-market.

> "By focusing on client outcomes rather than technology or product-based solutions, channel partners can put customers at the centre of their decision-making process."

CompTIA: What challenges do you see in the local IT channel?

KS: We really need to stay focused on the customer. With so much growth opportunity in the market, and a seemingly never-ending variety of new innovative technology, it can be easy to get carried away and lose sight of the core purpose of your business: the customers and their needs.

Leaders of IT channel partners need to be almost paranoid about not losing sight of the customer, no matter what else is happening in the market. The customer needs to be at the centre of the decision-making process. This way, the IT channel partner won't be waylaid by new technology and implement a solution just for the sake of implementing it.

If solutions are chosen solely to meet a customer's needs now and into the future, the decision-making process is more likely to be sound. This is what Staples Technology Solutions strives to do, and is a major contributing factor in our ongoing business success in the local market.

CompTIA: What opportunities do you see in the local IT channel?

KS: There are a lot of opportunities right now. As mentioned previously, cloud-based services are changing the game when it comes to IT infrastructure capability for mid-market and smaller businesses. This is great news for the end customer, and it opens up an enormous amount of new revenue possibilities for channel partners.

Other areas of opportunity include big data and analytics, workflow optimisation and business streamlining, and mobility, just to name a few. The reality is that there's a major evolution going on in a number of business areas, and each one of these areas represents entire portfolios of new opportunities.

It's an exciting time to be in the channel, and it's a good time to respond fast and early to attain a position of leadership, if possible. However, it's also important to remain pragmatic about solutions. Rather than taking a technology-centric view of customer needs, despite all the new solutions available, it is better to stay focused on client outcomes, not product brochures.

By focusing on client outcomes rather than technology or product-based solutions, channel partners can put customers at the centre of their decision-making process. This approach will not only help IT providers keep existing clients, it will also help them win new ones.

CompTIA: What successes have you had over the past year?

KS: There have been some great wins over the past year, with the private healthcare sector providing some new business for us. Of our clients in this market, a few are changing the way they're serving their customers, and we're helping them with that.

We've also had a couple of large education deals involving cloud and mobility. Much of this work is about delivering education in new ways, and enabling change in the outcomes of our customers in the sector. In all of these scenarios, we've tried to position Staples Technology Solutions as the central point of the discussions around change within these organisations. We've been able to do this by focusing heavily on the customer, working out precisely what

the customer needs, and then putting that at the centre of our decision-making process. By putting the customer first, we've been able to deliver real change-making solutions for our customers.

CompTIA: What are your plans for the year ahead?

KS: We're expecting further growth nationally over the coming year. Much of this will be organic, and continue the growth we've already seen in Australia. But we're also planning to build out new capabilities that run adjacent to, and can augment, our existing areas of expertise.

Additionally, because we're part of a very large organisation and we have a broad reach locally, we have access to a lot of data that can help us start conversations with existing and potential customers that may lead to new opportunities for both parties.

Managed print and workflow, for example, is an area that Staples puts a lot of energy into. We can tap into the activity in that part of the broader company's offering to look other ways we can help our customers do more with less, and about how we, as a subsidiary, can help to improve processes, workflows, or overall costs.

CompTIA: What advice can you give other IT channel players?

KS: I said it before and I'll say it again: it's all about the customer. The customer's needs should be at the core of the channel partners' decision-making process. If in doubt, the customer represents your 'true north'. Find out exactly what the customer's needs are, and then work on an outcomes-based solution.

Additionally, if you understand what the broader market is doing rather than simply what the technology is doing, it will help contribute to an outcomes-based decision-making process. On top of this, channel partners should focus on their points of difference and really leverage their strengths to increase these differences and stand out more prominently in the marketplace.