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Q AND A: MARTY KAUFMAN Accent Computer Solutions

I.T. services grow during hard times

By **Rebecca U. Cho** Staff Writer

RANCHO CUCAMONGA — As businesses began to cut back on new computer equipment and information technology staff during the recent recession, demand for I.T. services grew.

I.T. specialist Marty Kaufman was well positioned to help Inland Empire businesses looking to cut costs. His firm, Accent Computer Solutions, has seen business grow as more businesses grappled with aging computer systems and began outsourcing their I.T. help services.

Kaufman is no stranger to major industry changes like the Great Recession. He started as the I.T. department manager for defense industry contractor General Dynamics Corp. When the aerospace industry began leaving

Southern California, Kaufman opted out of following the company to Arizona. He instead started Accent Computer Solutions in 1987, and it has grown to 30 employees.

Kaufman spoke on how the Great Recession changed the needs of businesses for I.T. services and the biggest mistake small business owners make in approaching their I.T. systems.

Q: What kind of changes has the information technology sector seen in recent years?

A: What's been increasingly different is that my company in the last five years has had to completely transform. Technology has evolved to the point where a lot of people know a lot of stuff. My job

ACCENT A14



Will Lester Staff Photographer

Marty Kaufman is president of Rancho Cucamonga-based Accent Computer Solutions Inc., an information technology provider.

EMPIRE BUILDER Legendary mattress maker has little time to rest



Being a chief executive pickle when you grow up
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BUSINESS EXTRA

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is to stay in front and help small businesses figure out how to make businesses more efficient and reduce the risks of technology.

The other thing that's really changed is this world of the cloud. In the cloud computing world, the real key is you may use services while you're not at the office.

Q: What is a cloud?

A: The Internet is a cloud in itself. When you log onto an application like Yahoo mail, that's a cloud application, or Google Docs or QuickBooks online, any online applications you can just subscribe to and can use. That's changed the whole business world. It used to be you use QuickBooks at the office and somebody may have had to put it in the server to do that. (Now) you don't have to subscribe but install it online. But the difference is some companies have to be a hybrid. They need some things on site and others are in the cloud. My company's job is to help architect the solution, and (look for) the potential bad that can come, where's the data and how can a company get it ...

Q: How do you help companies navigate the cloud?

A: Is it possible to do whatever they want to do in the cloud? We have to help them figure that out. In the medical field, if you want to integrate or plug in a dialysis machine or eye-test machine to the electronic medical records system, you have to literally plug those things together. You can't do that in a cloud because there are no physical plugs in a cloud, you've got a connection to the Internet. Or certain applications where it doesn't make sense. In the heavy manufacturing world, it'll be too many transactions so it gets slow. And the biggest problem with cloud services right now is

the speed. You have to make sure you have a very consistent and reliable Internet connection and you have to be fast. Otherwise everybody is slow and they don't know why and it'll be clear the Internet is slow. That's one of the biggest gotchas of the world of cloud computing is the Internet performance.

Q: How has the recession impacted the I.T. services business?

A: What we saw was a lot of layoffs, especially in the I.T. world. We grew in the recession. The reason we grew was companies were trying to figure out how do things without spending as much money as before. They would cut back on I.T. resources. They would get rid of a salary and replace it for less, that's what people were doing. If (a company) had an I.T. staff of two people and it's costing \$60,000-plus a year, I can manage the I.T. department for half of that. It's easier and cheaper for me to do it than the customers themselves. (Our) staff of 30 engineers knows a whole bunch more than a staff of one or two.

Q: How else did companies cutting back on operational costs affect your business?

A: Unfortunately, the other side is people didn't buy equipment. They held off on buying equipment. So our job was harder during this time to keep things working with the old stuff.

Q: How did customers' needs change during the recession?

A: The biggest problem over the course of the recessionary times has been old equipment failing. The No. 1 objective over the last two years has been to protect my client from equipment that's going to fail, meaning we don't let them lose data. We at the company have been focusing on what we call the let-it-break strategy. We know

three to five years is the time frame if physical equipment on site is going to have to be replaced. Everybody knows computers are not going to last forever. What are we going to do when it breaks, not if it breaks? We'd put together a procedure that costs way less than to replace all equipment but that will still protect them in case of a broken server. That's been huge.

Q: Are more businesses buying new computer equipment now?

A: It began to change at the beginning of this year when people said they will start rebuying stuff. I've seen a slowdown in the last six weeks or so. I don't know if that's indicative of the double dip we've been talking about or not.

Q: What is the biggest mistake small business owners make in managing their I.T. systems?

A: Small business owners most of the time will not do the normal required maintenance on a system. It is very much like a car, it needs regularly scheduled stuff done. People are waiting until the system breaks and calling someone, which is quite a bit more costly than taking care of it before it needs to be done.

The very largest mistake is waiting until something breaks and calling then instead of being proactive. If they're not updating the antivirus software, they get a virus and the system is down for a day or two. Or the system crashes because they didn't pay attention to disk space being full. Or everything is slow because they didn't have anybody monitoring the Internet connectivity part of it. Or the system does break because it didn't have good backups. There should be a lot of proactive monitoring so we can tell when something is going to go wrong.

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An assembly line works to put together a mattress at Rancho Cucamonga. Below: Ruben S. side-stitch on a Vitagenic mattress.

KLUFT

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said. "You can buy a really nice bed for \$1,500."

The mattress company employs about 100 people at its Rancho Cucamonga factory. Employees can earn \$40,000 to \$60,000 per year, and Kluff said selling luxury goods at a high price enables the firm to achieve the profit margins necessary to remain in California.

The American mattress industry experienced a decline in sales volume during the Great Recession. Statistics from the Virginia-based International Sleep Products Association show that from 2008 to 2009, national mattress and foundation sales dipped 8.6 percent to 32.8 million units sold.

Figures for 2010 are not yet available, but ISPA communications director Karin Mahoney said the industry association anticipates sales to increase this year and the next, with 2012 being a time of

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