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Vancouver reseller BlueCurl transitions to green IT provider

Originally formed to sell VoIP solutions, this Vancouver solution provider ended-up becoming a green innovator
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by Jeff Jedras

BlueCurl didn't begin with the idea of becoming a green solution provider. Instead, it just kind of happened, says Chris Slattery, president and CEO of the Vancouver-based solution provider.

Indeed, although he was a 30-year veteran of the industry, Slattery was actually looking to get out of the IT business when he formed BlueCurl with some partners in March 2006. At that time the company was focused purely on selling IP PBX and VoIP solutions from ShoreTel to the enterprise space. However, Slattery says his commission sales staff told him it took too long to close a VoIP deal, they needed more to be able to put food on the table.

That led to BlueCurl gaining certifications from HP, IBM, Cisco Systems and others to expand its business area and give the sales staff a little more to work with, but Slattery says the goal was never expansion just for the sake of expansion.

"We're not like the traditional or typical VAR. I didn't want to be, like, 'me too,'" said Slattery. "We can sell this and this and it just gets to be a price game; that's not what I wanted. We look for very strategic solutions."

With both HP and IBM, BlueCurl focuses on server and storage for the SMB, enterprise and government spaces, but it wasn't until Slattery was introduced to NComputing that BlueCurl really went green. And the introduction came in an unusual way.

A Redwood City, Calif.-based company named one of CDN's Top 5 Vendors to Watch for 2008, NComputing offers a desktop virtualization solution comprised of software and hardware, essentially an LCD monitor that allows multiple simultaneous users to harness the computing power of one low-cost desktop or server. In addition to costing as little as \$70 per user, it also uses less power than a traditional desktop PC.

Slattery says it was actually one of his business partners, a person with a background in the automotive industry and no IT experience, who told him he had to check out this new company. After initially blowing him off, Slattery eventually did and was impressed with what he saw, particularly the technology's potential to dramatically reduce the total cost of ownership from a capital acquisition perspective, as well as reduce power use, the carbon footprint and e-waste.

"You're always looking for key differentiators, particularly in our business, so you can get away from the 'me too' approach to business," said Slattery.

Recognizing the potential of the NComputing technology, bundled with HP's newer, energy efficient desktops and servers, BlueCurl decided to bring the solution to the education space. It's a market that has a strong need for technology, but is lagging well behind due to the capital costs.

"We figured one of the best places to attack from a marketing perspective was the education market, and we attacked," said Slattery. "We figured that was going to be the one area we could go after, and quantify and provide true value for."

For the cost of one traditional 28-seat lab, Slattery says BlueCurl can implement three labs based on its solution. And those savings are based on capital cost alone, he says, without factoring in the 94 per cent savings on the energy bill.

BlueCurl implemented the first carbon neutral computer lab in Canada for Lindsay Park Elementary in Kimberly, B.C. and Slattery says it took just four hours to deploy. The bulk of that, he adds, was unpacking the equipment. The solution's success has snowballed in the school district space, with BlueCurl implanting labs for schools across Western Canada.

While the cost savings are an undeniable part of the solutions' success, Slattery says more and more people are getting behind the less tangible benefits of going green, looking for ways from an IT perspective that they can offset some of the damage they're passing on to the next generation.

And with talks underway with a federal government department, BlueCurl may be ready to take its green solution to the next level. As the numbers scale up, on a 1,000-seat implementation the capital cost savings alone are at least \$1.2 million, says Slattery.

"From a Canadian taxpayer perspective, as well as from a green initiative perspective, they think this is the most frightening thing they've seen," he said.

BlueCurl is leveraging some of HP's (NYSE: HPQ) investments and work over the years on green IT in its solution and Dave Frederickson, vice-president of the solution partner organization at HP Canada, says green is a high priority in the market today.

HP has been seeking to identify and support key partners that have been establishing themselves as thought leaders in green technology, and Frederickson says BlueCurl is a partner that is doing just that.

"Blue Curl is a perfect example of a company that has put together a solution leveraging a lot of what HP has to offer, and linked that through to a vertical market, the education market space," said Frederickson. "Clearly there's an appetite in the market, and the channel is starting to rally around it."

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