

Tech Savvy Consulting Company Tackles IT Decisions, Acquisitions

It's a common situation: investors see potential in some sort of information-technology business, but the investors' backgrounds are heavy on finance, light on tech.

To help them judge the waters before taking the plunge, investors hire someone like Tim Caulfield.

“We help the investor trust but verify,” said Caulfield, using the language that Ronald Reagan famously used when describing negotiations with the Soviet Union.

With his Antara Group, Caulfield has found himself a niche — technology expertise for hire — where he can grow.

Antara Group helps companies determine their best use of data center services, such as managed services and cloud computing. It also consults on cybersecurity.

The business has grown every quarter — by at least 18 percent and often by 50 percent — since it started in December 2013. It now has nine consultants. Everyone in the company, Caulfield said, has played an operating role in previous jobs.

In Antara's first year, Caulfield said, 60 percent of his clients were private equity investors who needed some due diligence. In the future, he plans to broaden other parts of his business while taking the due diligence component down to 30 percent.

The business offers two other services.

What to Do With IT?

One is to determine the best technology strategy for an organization.

Antara worked with a city in Southern California to help it determine whether it should

build a data center of its own or work with an external service provider. After weighing issues such as cost, the consultants determined that the city should transition from an in-house data center to a cloud-based center, and make the switch gradually over several years. It drew up a step-by-step plan for the transition.

Antara works under nondisclosure agreements and won't identify its clients by name.

Antara's third area is business strategy. Caulfield recalled one client company in the technology space had targeted 30 percent growth, but was getting only 20 percent. Antara found that the wrong person was in charge of sales. It also restructured the sales department's day-to-day routine and changed the department's compensation plan.

Before co-founding Antara, Caulfield was CEO of American Internet Services, whose main data center is in Kearny Mesa. Prior to that, he was co-founder of a consulting firm in Denver that had a slightly different technology emphasis. Capto Consulting Inc. focused on IT outsourcing.

Caulfield is sole investor in Antara and has put a "modest" amount of money into it.

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Half of Antara's workforce is in San Diego; others are in Dallas; Hartford, Conn.; Los Angeles; and Philadelphia.

Following the Rules

With the addition of Howard Asher earlier this month, Antara has strengthened its services around compliance: that is, complying with the strict federal regulations on health and credit information, as well as certain other information. In the life sciences and medical fields, companies must be particularly careful about data privacy. At one time, Asher led Sun Microsystems' global life and health sciences business unit. Some readers may remember BioQ Inc., which Asher founded.

Caulfield does not equate running a consulting company with being your own boss. Often, he is not calling the shots, and he finds that the consulting life requires some flexibility.

He recalled needing a few days of down time, so he took a ski trip to Mammoth. On the second day of the trip, a client called. There was a big problem that needed solving — fast. Caulfield resigned himself to going back to work sooner than he planned. (As things turned out, he was able to find a happy medium, skiing from 8 a.m. to noon and beginning his workdays at a Mammoth office at 1 p.m.)

Antara — like many other consulting companies — can market itself on the simple premise that everyone occasionally needs a fresh eye to look at a problem.

Caulfield spoke about investors getting the feeling that they are buying the next Amazon.com Inc. (Nasdaq: AMZN). If you think you're buying the next Amazon, Caulfield said, Antara can tell you that you are indeed buying something interesting — he emphasized the word “interesting” — but not the next Amazon.

ANTARA GROUP

CEO: Tim Caulfield

Revenue: Undisclosed

No. of local employees: Five

Investor: Tim Caulfield

Headquarters: Point Loma

Year founded: 2013

Company description: Management consulting firm with tech capabilities

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