

# MSP SUCCESS

MAGAZINE

Keep Your  
Company  
*Ahead Of The Curve*  
On Cybersecurity

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Southwest Networks,  
Tells Us How*

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Special Edition: Spring 2020

Matt Disher, President Of Southwest Networks

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Southwest Networks Inc.

Cover Photo by Tom Cisneros



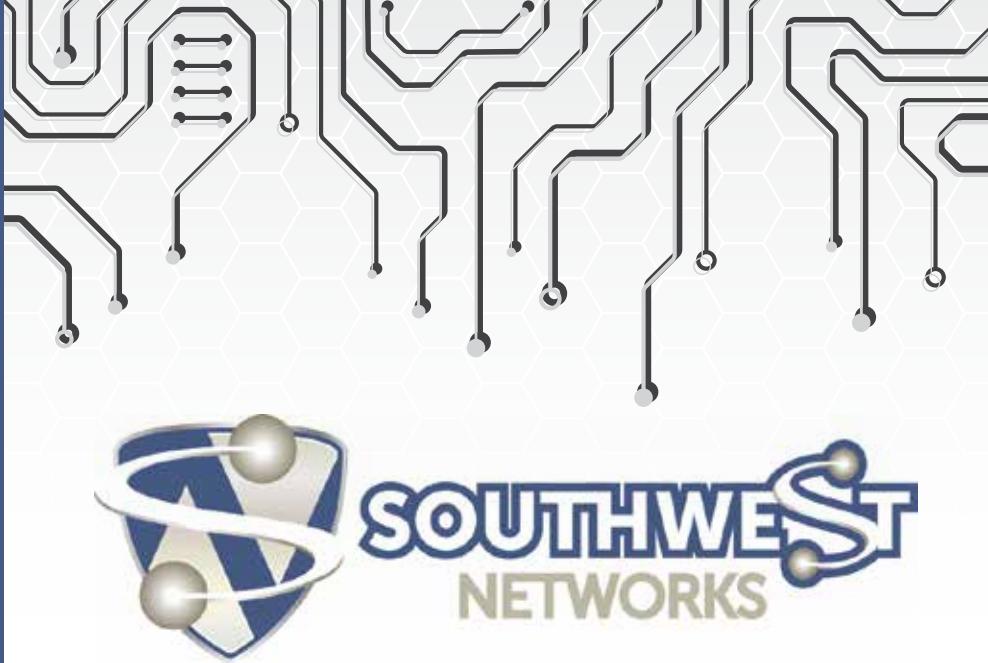
**Company:**  
Southwest Networks Inc.

**Founded:**  
1996

**Headquartered:**  
Palm Desert, California

**Geographic Market:**  
Primarily the Coachella Valley,  
but spreading into other areas  
of Southern California as well

**President:**  
Matt Disher



## Tips & Tricks From An MSP Company Speeding Ahead Of The Curve

### What are the top three metrics you use to measure your business and why?

Like a lot of businesses, I use gross income and net profit. However, what sets Southwest Networks, Inc. apart is that we're an ESOP company — we have an employee stock ownership plan. So, instead of just looking at our net profit, we also use our annual stock price as a gauge in how well we are doing year over year.

Every year as an ESOP company, we have to go through an appraisal process. We hand over our financials, and another party analyzes the company to figure out what we're worth and compares us to other companies in the industry. Our employees are issued stock certificates, just like a publicly traded company. Other than that, customer satisfaction is at our company's core. We make sure we're constantly working on maintaining and improving that.

### What is the top lesson you had to learn that allowed you to kick-start your business growth?

For me, the top lesson was that we're not the right fit for everyone. Instead of trying to serve everybody, we had to concentrate on the clients who understood what our strengths were and what we brought to the table and could truly utilize our services.

When you're trying to grow, sometimes you can be tempted to take on any and all business, but that can come back to bite you. Now, we're concentrating on doing what we do best and finding types of clients who can appreciate those services.

## **What would you say was your single secret to your success this past year?**

Our single secret would be that we're ahead of the curve as far as security is concerned. I started working on our company's security a couple years ago, investing heavily in technicians and engineers, keeping up on education, encouraging advanced certifications, attending events, strengthening partnerships, and building our security stack so we can provide the right security services. That has put us ahead of the curve at a time when cybercriminals and hackers around the world are attacking IT companies like ours to get to their clients. We've invested heavily in internal tools and protecting our house, and that has allowed us to concentrate on providing the best security stack for our clients to fit their needs and ensure they're protected, from securities training to antivirus protection. Thanks to that foresight, we were able to go to market and bring these services to our clients sooner rather than later. To be frank, my clients and I sleep better at night knowing we've done what we need to do to keep our data safe. That emphasis on security also serves to differentiate us from other providers in our area.

## **What was the biggest challenge you had to overcome this past year related to either reaching that growth or as a result of that growth?**

Well, security is in the eye of the beholder. Some of our clients have said, "You've done such a great job so far, so we haven't had any attacks. Why do I need to add this other stuff?" It's become an educational process. To explain our security concerns and the logic behind our services to clients, I launched a monthly video blog called Cappuccino Chat. I like a good cup of coffee, so I decided I'd interview an employee or a client, or do something on my own, and just talk to the camera over a cup of coffee. It's conversational and educational, not salesy. By releasing a monthly video, I'm not hearing as many clients ask things like, "You just talked to me a year ago. Why are you back now saying we need more security?" But we're still in the process of educating people about the fact that security is not a one and done deal — it's a constantly evolving thing you need to look at and evaluate. You need to look at the different risks, determine the risk level of each one, and then decide what to do.

## **Who would you say is the most impactful business leader or business thought-leader whose techniques or leadership style you either try to emulate, follow, or are influenced by, and why?**

For me, one person or leader doesn't stand out from the pack. What I really love is the community of leaders I can

immerse myself in at industry events. I've really been investing in that, getting out there, and taking advantage of the chance to hear from a lot of great business and thought leaders. I try to take a bit from them all and mold it into my leadership style.

I've learned not to try to emulate a single person, as it comes off as fake, and you won't have the same success they've had. Instead, I think it's better to take inspiration from someone and then do things your way. No one else is Richard Branson! I couldn't get away with what he does. If I tried, I wouldn't get the same results. Instead, I'm learning from how he conducts business and how he invests.

Those are good lessons I can take and make part of my own style. If I had to name names, one figure at the top of my list would be Darren Hardy. He brings a different perspective to things, which I like. I also admire many leaders in our industry, including Rob Rae, the vice president of business development with Datto. I love the energy and passion he brings to that company.

## **What book would you recommend to other MSPs or SMBs trying to grow their businesses?**

I'd recommend "Start With Why" by Simon Sinek. It's all about getting to know yourself, what you're capable of, and why you're doing this. There are a lot of ups and downs in business, and when you're down, it's important to remember why you're working so hard and what you're trying to do with your company. You'll get smacked around once in a while, and you have to remember that "why" to stay motivated and keep going.

## **In closing, do you have any specific advice or words of wisdom you would give to other MSPs looking to grow or build a successful exit for their business?**

My words of wisdom would be to build a great team and invest in their growth. That includes offering additional education, certificates, and opportunities within the company to grow personally.

Also, be part of the community. Make it a point to spend time with like-minded individuals who want to grow their businesses. Go to events, mingle, ask questions, and participate — don't just stand off in the corner and do nothing! Better yet, get to know the vendors and the partners and learn from their experiences. Lots of partners and vendors have been in an MSP space before and have knowledge to share.

Last but not least, always be learning! Things are always changing and there's always something new to learn, and I try to take advantage of that every day. That's what I really love about IT. ■