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Small-Business Profile

Technology firm pushes customer service

By Danielle Birkin / Contributing Writer

Shelly Rounds is passionate about exceptional customer service, and believes it should extend to all industries, including technology.

Rounds is co-founder of Uptime, a Las Vegas company that specializes in network and computer sales, installation, system design, consulting and monthly maintenance of client's systems. Uptime is also a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner with Microsoft designated competencies in network solutions, advanced infrastructure solutions and security solutions. In a recent Microsoft customer satisfaction survey, Uptime ranked in the top 25 percent of Microsoft Certified Partners in the United States, and hopes to eventually rank in the top 5 percent.

Yet Rounds is the first to admit the technology industry is not known for its commitment to customer service.

"In Las Vegas in the gaming industry they specialize in customer service, but in technology in general when (people) think of Las Vegas, I don't think technology and customer service was on top of the list as what was represented," said Rounds.

She has a background in customer service and operations management and established Uptime with \$50,000 in personal funds in her garage in 2001 with her husband, Dave Rounds, an engineer with extensive experience in sales.

"So we wanted to start a company that offered the expertise in technology that was not here and extraordinary customer service that was not expected. Our whole focus is wowing the customer, and our whole core message is focused on that.

"You can always find an incredible engineer, but the challenge we have is finding great engineers who not only are experts in their field but are also excellent in customer service. So our interviewing process is much longer. and it's like finding a needle in a haystack, but it's worth it to find that special person."

Educating the customer and establishing a lasting relationship is also of paramount importance to Rounds.

"We don't want to be IT snobs," she said. "We want to make sure our clients understand what's going on, so we educate them if they want to know. And some don't want to know; they just want to have it fixed.

"But most important is customer satisfaction. We want to go in and offer expertise to clients that not only helps them today but helps them five years from now. We're not just selling technology, we're selling customer service. We don't want to create a situation where in six months when they add employees they have to add something they didn't even think they needed.



Shelly Rounds, co-owner of Uptime, is shown in her office at 6280 S. Valley View Blvd. on Tuesday.

Photo by R. Marsh Starks

"So we're not giving you something that works today and not tomorrow, but something that grows with the company. Most of our customers are growing so we find out what their needs are. We want to get to the heart of the problem, and we're adamant about that."

Katrina Ferry, president of Las Vegas-based Alternative Management, which provides administrative, management, events planning, organizational review and goal-setting services for professional, membership-based, nonprofit organizations, is an enthusiastic Uptime client, having been referred to the company by a friend earlier this year.

"I am not able to know everything about running my small business; so I have to outsource certain functions, and selecting Uptime has saved me personally so much time and has allowed me to focus on what I know in running my business, it's like having an IT department in-house, and they are a partner with us," Ferry said.

"I have purchased computers through them, I purchased a server through them, and they do monthly maintenance to make sure all my servers are up-to-date and my backups are running correctly. They're also on call with questions my employees may have on anything from how to run Outlook to which PDA to buy."

Although Ferry's background is in computers, she said the industry is much different that it was 20 years ago when she was in college.

"So instead of attempting to figure something out, I just have my office manager call Uptime," she said, adding that partnering with the company is one of the best business decisions she has made this year.

"There's always somebody there and the technical capabilities of their staff has been fantastic. Their response time is right on-whenver I call someone answers the phone and if there's a problem they come out immediately and they also follow-up. I feel like they care about my systems and my company."

Among Uptime's most popular products is its Managed Monthly Service Agreements, whereby the company services clients' servers twice a month either on-site or remotely.

This includes applying security patches and updates; checking and verifying backups restore; checking the server error logs; testing UPS functionality; and verifying anti-virus updates.

"We maintain the servers with proactive maintenance so customers have increased uptime," Rounds said, adding that she wants to put Las Vegas on the map when it comes to technology.

"A lot of the time, large or mid-size companies in the state would call up Microsoft partners in Phoenix or California that had the level of expertise they needed and fly them in. What we wanted to do is create a name for ourselves that the city has the expertise now and they don't have to use companies in other states for large projects, and that's really huge for us. There's no reason Las Vegas can't have the expertise here in the city, and the companies that are moving here expect that."

Rounds said Uptime's growth rate has averaged more than 70 percent in revenue each year, and the company is on track to apply to the Inc. 500 list.

"I attribute our tremendous growth in the last four years to our customer service and word of mouth from our customers-our best advertisement," she said.

Uptime

Owners: Shelly and Dave Rounds

Year founded: 2001

Address: 6280 S. Valley View Blvd., Suite 416

Type of business: Network solutions and system design

Workforce: Ten employees

While employee recruitment can present difficulties for any business, Rounds said, she is fortunate to have a talented staff in place.

"Our main challenge is trying to stay with the core message as we bring in new employees," Rounds said. "It's really easy for the owner to go out and take care of the customer because we know what they want, so we have to make sure the customer gets the same quality of care from our employees that they get from us. And we have a phenomenal team of employees that are really committed."

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