Project: **Techie Co. Voice of the Customer**
Respondent: **Alfonso Ribeiro**
Company: **Amazing Medical Systems**

Your role and the background of Amazing Medical Systems?

I'm the president of the company. I founded the company about just over 20 years ago. We have software that allows medical companies, pharmaceutical, medical device, to collect data used in clinical trials and also to manage clinical trials. Our primary- most of our customers are medical device. We have software architected on a Windows platform and we have not yet webified the software. That meant that if we were going to compete in the Software as a Service Realm, we had to deploy to Citrix. We basically have a very large Citrix database that Techie Co. hosts for us. And we have been a customer of Techie Co. places, seven years, eight years. You might know better than I do?

No.

I'm thinking it's got to be about seven or eight years. Seven years, I'm going to guess. Maybe a little – something around those lines. Probably started maybe 2006. That can't be right. Make it 12 years, it can't be that – Anyway, it's quite a long time.

Your customers have to install anything on their desktops or have a server website?

No, it's all webified.

It's all done through a web browser?

Yes.

Are those customers generally in North America or worldwide?

Probably I guess about – There's a difference between our customers and the people who log in. Our customers are primarily probably 90% US-based, maybe 80% US-based. But the people who log in are all over the world. And because they are hospitals who log in a fair amount. They're coming from all over. A clinical trial – a US company may have a clinical trial that's based in Europe.

What's the log in frequency for a particular user?

I'll give you a number that kind of may help you. We probably pick around 80 users in the system at a given time, of which probably five of them are us. And there are probably around 2,000 people who could be in the system. It's really hard because there are some people who are literally sitting in there all day, and there are some people who come in once a year. It's all over the place.

Besides hosting and serving up your product, any other parts of IT Techie Co. handles for Amazing?

Yes, you guys have been providing services to us with respect to hardening the infrastructure at Techie Co. and hardening our infrastructure and improving our security environment and helping us with policies. And in fact, I had a meeting just yesterday with Yan and Stephanie. I don't know – You probably don't know what the Techie Co. people do?

No.

You and the Techie Co. people – No?

I'm a consultant.

We have been using their consulting services a fair amount.

From a security standpoint?

Yes, and vulnerabilities and user –

Any other back office applications they're hosting?

Yes and no. Most of our back office applications are actually written or actually use our own software. We have databases in the same environment firm as all our client databases, which actually have business operational data and management for us.

You've build the business and IT to be hand fitted for your purpose?

Yes, for example because our software is designed, it's kind of a very, very flexible system. You can build any kind of business system you want out of it. For example, tracking our quality – our standard operating procedures, training, audits, CAPAs, managing all the users, managing all our customers, managing

sales leads. That's all done using our software on different databases that are hosted at Techie Co..

Do they provide any other services?

[00:06:14]

Not at the moment. We use another party. Yes, there are some services now that actually are being pushed down to our laptops from Techie Co., but the majority of our laptop management is actually done by a second vendor called Threepoints.

Were you involved in Techie Co.'s selection to be your partner?

Yes, I was.

Walk me through that selection process.

We were going back ten years here though, I think. Things had changed. We went out looking for hosting companies. We were particularly interested in price point at that time. And our model of how what Techie Co. provided us is different now than it was then. At that time, it was managed services. We were basically buying into the Techie Co. blade farm and just basically buying the use of individual servers that were managed by Techie Co.. The model now is that we actually have rent our own rental blade from Techie Co.. It's a different kind of model. But going back to then, we looked to landing two other vendors looking at pricing and determined at that time that Techie Co. seemed to be – First of all, we like dealing with Bradley, who is the contact point. We'd had had referrals from another company that was using Techie Co., that they were very happy with them. And then the pricing was pretty good.

How did you find them?

I don't think Techie Co. ten years ago had the advertising presence they have now. And it's not so much advertising, it's sponsorship. I hear Techie Co., the name Techie Co., regularly because I listen to Public Radio and that's a big one for them. And then I also like soccer, we've seen through that. But ten years ago, I don't think they had that kind of presence. I think it was just by general searches for data centers in the Phoenix at that time.

Sounds like you liked Bradley and were impressed with what he was telling you?

[00:09:31]

Yes.

You decided based on Bradley and price?

Yes, I would say that – No, I think we were impressed overall by the Techie Co.'s professionalism as well and what looked like a strong range of services at the time, that as we needed to expand, they would be able to handle that.

Why were you looking for hosting companies?

20 years ago, there was no such thing as hosting. We wrote software that we'd sell to companies, they would install on their own computers. Then the wonderful World Wide Web came along and people didn't want to do that anymore, but we were still selling software that you installed in your own computer. Hosting is a parallel option. We have customers who purchase the softwares from us and they're still running it in-house. This is a new offering, an additional offering from us to say, "Hey, you don't have to worry about any of the maintenance, worrying about installing the software, backups, any of that kind of stuff. We'll do all that for you." And that decision was made around 2006, 2007, that we need to go in that direction.

Back then, Amazon was either brand new at that –

They didn't exist at that time.

– or they might not have existed.

They didn't exist in that form.

You needed hosting since you were going from pure on-prem to SaaS model?

Yes.

Your experiences with Techie Co.?

We are constantly amazed by skill of the engineers, that's – And we haven't had to deal with that recently a lot, but in general – By the way, we've been a customer about close to ten years. I've kind of pulled that out. The engineers are very sharp. We've been often very impressed with technical support we've had

from Techie Co.. In general, it seems like there's a lot of very bright people working there. That's a real positive for us. We know that if this is a technical problem, someone from Techie Co. probably is going to be able to figure it out. That's always been very good. Let's see. Basically, I'm lauding Techie Co., that's what you want me to do right now? [CROSSTALK]

[00:12:50]

You can go either direction.

Either direction.

You told me about engineers.

[CROSSTALK] Smart engineers, no doubt about that. I sometimes occasionally I worry that they're encouraging us to spend money on services that maybe we don't really need but that's really hard to say. That sometimes worries me. I think that the pricing – we've had situations where the pricing's been revisited. We put some pressure on them because we actually have opened up a second data center with, and I've told Bradley this, in Europe using Amazon Web Services. And I think that maybe put some pricing pressure on them. But that was OK because it is a lot less expensive. However, the value for money is kind of different. The technical support is kind of different. Both are good for us, but we like having our central data center with Techie Co. right now. We're very happy with that. What else can I say?

Clarify on Techie Co.'s technical support feeling better than Amazon's to you.

I'm not sure I'm going to say that. We've had good support from Amazon. I don't think – That is not necessarily true. And there is actually one difference because with Amazon, often the technical support is free or is included in the pricing, whereas Techie Co., everything costs us money. If you have a lot of stuff going on, you can get run up some big bills. That being said, the nature of the support is slightly different. You talk to somebody, it's somebody smart who figures it out pretty quickly, whereas with Techie Co. – with Amazon, you're probably dealing with an engineer in India or something, and the – it may take longer to resolve the issue, and you don't get to the nub of the issue as fast. They're probably just as skilled; it's just that might be an issue. That is [CROSSTALK] additional money.

You're in a bigger queue, and the resource may not be familiar with your environment.

No, we've had very good response times from them. I don't – I haven't – we haven't seen real issues with that. We haven't had issues with response times. Let's see what else we like about Techie Co.. Always been impressed with the data center, the operational center. They're – they seem to be on top of everything, so from that point of view, we're very confident in the choice of the [INAUDIBLE sounds like: vendor]. Negatives, I think Bradley has been spread too thin sometimes, and I'm glad now that we have Mike Meyers [ph], who is now our – is a contact person for us. And I think that will help a little bit, because I think it's sometimes difficult for Bradley to get back to us. And I've had some frustrations with that in the past, and I think – I – personally I think he's just too busy, but has – when he does get back, has been responsive. That's – it's all very expensive though. It's probably our biggest cost to our business, is our Techie Co. data center, by far actually.

[00:17:03]

More than your people?

No, sorry. No, of individual costs – I'm talking about vendors. I'm not talking – people are my biggest costs. Excluding people, Techie Co. is my biggest cost.

Have you had situations where you're leading Techie Co. to offer a better service or price? Do you have examples of that?

Yes, I think that when – it's hard to say, because when we switched blades recently, we got effectively better pricing. We actually paid more, but we get much more for our money. And I don't know if Bradley was waiting to give us that information, when – what the scenario was with when he gave us that information. But if it was driven by something else, something we said, or it was just that he needed us to be technically ready to go to that. So it's not clear what drove that offer from him for the new blade, because he'd been talking about that for a while. It was like, suddenly – we'd been paying a lot of money. Let's go through our scenario. We had started off with a couple of – two or three managed servers. We then gradually increased our managed servers more and more and more, and we're running – spending a lot of money every month. And adding every server cost us a lot more money, and we were paying for users. And they helped us. And then Bradley said, why don't you rent a blade from us? Why didn't he mention that to us a while before? That would have saved us money. And I don't know if it was a good break – even point for us to do that, but then hey, this is much better. However, then that came with its own licensing issues from Microsoft that we had to resolve, which cost us money. But still,

we're a lot better off because 12 servers is the same price as a blade – as – no, 10 servers is probably the same price as a blade. And a blade gives you 15 servers. No, it's probably [INAUDIBLE] work better than that. It's probably seven managed servers is equivalent to a blade that gives you 15 servers. So we use –

I'm hearing you say, there's a question as to why the blade wasn't suggested earlier since it would have been a better bang for buck.

[00:20:07]

I – yes.

You were paying more and more for servers and could have gotten into the blade package earlier.

Maybe, yes. And we're in the business of this kind of stuff too, and you're trying to sell things, and is the job of Techie Co. to maximize the profitability. I don't deny that. You don't go out and say to your customer – normally you don't go out to your customer and say "Hey, I can give this to you a lot cheaper" if they aren't complaining. So I get that; that's normal business practice. So I don't take offense at it at all. It's just – and then – but in the business of data farms and managed services, which has become very competitive, there's a risk that you'll lose business quietly because they don't realize that they can get a cheaper price. So that's the risk to Techie Co.. And so it may make sense to have a review maybe to say, is this the best setup for you guys? For the company financially, is this the best model right now? And for us right now, I think we're in a good place, and I don't think there is any better model. But it may be worth that for maybe some of their customers.

Whether it was Bradley or Mike, do they understand your business well and know how their service fits in, how they could make suggestions more proactively? Do they understand your business well?

Yes, I think so. I'm not sure Mike does, because he's only been our rep for about six months. But Bradley I think has a pretty good understanding of our business. And our business is very – because we are taking Windows software and pushing it out to the Web, we end up using a lot of servers for very little – let's – let me back up here. If we had a Web based application, a true Web based application, we would need half the number of servers we have I would guess, and we could have thousands of simultaneous users versus scores of simultaneous users. Having a Window – pushing a Windows app to the Web is very expensive in terms of server resources, and we know that. And in fact, we're

planning to start getting into Web apps ourselves this year, which means we are a much higher user of their hardware. For a company of 11 people, we are using a heck of a lot of hardware, much more so than you would normally expect.

[00:23:09]

Because of your architecture?

Because of our architecture. It's our goal to deal with that, but that's – that makes it a lot worse than it should be.

Bradley, given his tenure with you, he understand your business. Mike is newer and just getting up to speed?

Yes.

About the value proposition of Techie Co., for Amazing and also the broader market – what is their value to your company?

The key thing is, it's – what's important to our business is stability of our software offering. They want to be able to come in at any time and know it's there and know it's running well. Techie Co. gives us the power and the technical support that we feel pretty confident about that, and the monitoring support, so if there's a problem, we're alerted. And that makes us feel good.

They're watching it 24/7, they're the technical support, they can alert you and take care of the issue before it affects your customer.

Yes.

You have a general peace of mind because Techie Co. provides that service?

Yes.

You don't go to bed worrying about it?

Yes.

It sounds like you invest a lot to have that relationship, and they're providing a critical service to serving up your product to customers.

Absolutely. We wouldn't have a business without their service.

I'd imagine you've looked at different models and ROI. Does the ROI still exist to keep it with Techie Co. vs. in-house or another vendor?

Bringing it in-house would be a non-starter for us because of the hardware infrastructure required. The fact that there are multiple Internet channels in, we would – be very hard for us to do that. The fact that they have backup generators – we wouldn't be able to do that. We – there's no way we can get to the level of – and SOC 2-SOC 3 compliance. All those things, we would never be able to bring this in-house. That's the first. What was – sorry, what was the second question?

[00:26:22]

Just ROI.

And then – it has allowed us to focus on really other areas and not have to think about the hardware side. And it's also meant that we probably don't have as many IT resources as we would have needed. So it's probably – in terms of head count, it's helped us.

Looking for a conversation about what makes Techie Co. unique and distinct. You talked about how they're different from AWS. If you compare Techie Co. to other providers you've worked with, how are they different?

Boy, that's – [INAUDIBLE] we haven't dealt with any other real – other than AWS, any other IT service – we have one, Solution Builders, which is a much smaller operation and doing quite different things. So one thing I will say is, Techie Co. clearly has its own SOPs and its own quality systems really in good shape, which it needs to given the size it has, which I think is refreshing. But hard to do a comparison other than that. I'm sure if you're dealing with bigger companies, they can probably answer that question better than we could.

You highlighted things, like Bradley, their people, smart engineers, peace of mind that they're watching, security and data center are strong. Those things lend themselves to what's distinct. We don't know how others might do the same things. Could you pull up five words to describe Techie Co., summarize your relationship with them?

Relationship or their product?

Their product.

I would say consistent. Safe, which is a word I think they use, so I probably just picked that up from something they used.

[00:29:28]

Their marketing must be doing a good job.

They're doing a great job. I think savvy – you're looking for [CROSSTALK] words. Five words – integrity and reactive. I should be in marketing, shouldn't I?

You probably are.

I am.

Tell me about reactive.

Reactive in a positive way, in the sense that if something comes up, they're all over it. Not reactive in the negative way in that, not – versus proactive. I just [CROSSTALK] proactive could be – you could switch that out for proactive if you want. But I think in the business that we're in, they have to react because there are external things happening all the time. They are obviously proactive already. They have the data center where they're monitoring what's going on; that's the proactive. But they're also reactive, which means if something does happen, they move very quickly on it. And we've seen that a number of times.

What's an example?

Denial of service attack, our hardware CPU spiking, those kind of things.

Integrity – what's an example of where Techie Co. exhibited that?

I trust them. I trust them and I trust the engineers. I think they're making – they are making the decisions not with some – they're making the decision, I think for the most part, which is best for you in their minds.

Part of this study is, how can Techie Co. better position themselves, differentiate themselves, to existing clients and the business development side. You were in marketing, and since you run a small company you know a lot about positioning. How could Techie Co. do a better job?

I think what they need to do is differentiate themselves from the AWSs of this world. That's really the whole issue of local versus national, and the dangers

associated with the AWSs of this world. And that's the challenge I think for them probably in the marketing point of view, where I can go off and get a server for probably half the price from AWS. I don't know if it's half the price. From AWS – I don't know if it's half the price – but a lot less, spend a lot of money, because if I'm just doing a single server that I just want hosted somewhere, I probably wouldn't go with Techie Co.. I would probably just go to AWS. But if I am worrying about a – and I don't think that's their business, to be honest. But if I am worrying about – if I think that my server is going to grow to two servers, four servers, and I'm going to be running a business that's going to sit and be dependent, then I want somebody who is looking out for me, which AWS is not. I'm just another – I'm just – they don't know me from Adam, that you can – they don't know who you are. And that's the real key differentiator I think for a company like Techie Co., is that personal relationship and the looking out for your business, and being aware of your business. That's key importance.

[00:33:56]

Do you feel that can traverse state lines? How could they expand outside Arizona and the southwest?

I think it can go across state lines, because it's a difference of scale. It's – let's take it back. It's Dunder Mifflin versus Staples, if we go back to the office. That's what it is; it's Dunder Mifflin versus Staples. Are you an Office watcher?

I've watched it. I know what you're talking about.

There's an ongoing theme there; it's personal service, it's the one who knows that you're this, that, that. It's Dunder Mifflin versus Staples. So that's, I think, the thing. Whether it can go across state lines, I think it can. I think it can because that relationship – establishing a relationship can be done. However though, I think there has to be some face to face, I think, which is hard. And that's hard to do, unless it's a big enough account that it's worth flying out there, but – or driving wherever it is. But I think it can happen.

Local vs. national, and being able to see someone vs. talk on the phone. That can be a differentiator.

Yes.

That ends my questions.

Very good.

Do you have other questions or thoughts?

No, I think that's good. I love to see that Techie Co. is – and I think it's – I don't know if you guys are the market – actually their marketing company, or are you a separate group? [INAUDIBLE] marketing.

I'm a sole practitioner, consultant, that works with technology companies. Been doing it nine years, and do a lot of market research work.

Because I'm really fascinated by the fact that they sponsor – they don't have adverts so much as sponsor. And I've always thought that was actually a really smart move, because it's a lot less expensive, and I think you get as much – and you get a better quality exposure. And if you're selling business to business and you're selling to the CEOs of companies, they're likely to be listening to NPR or whatever, or – I think it's a smart move versus advertising. I really do. And I've thought about doing that ourselves for our company, thought about doing it and sponsoring something on public radio, just a discrete group of people who probably listen. Anyway, I'm – that's good, and if you have any more questions, feel free to email me.

I will. Thanks. Have a great day.

[00:36:57]

Very good. Thanks.

Bye.

Bye-bye.