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Edafio Technology Partners – an IT Consulting, Managed Services, Cybersecurity, Multi-Cloud Services Group enabling Clients to Focus on their Business and Not on Technology



Kenny Kinley
CEO & President

Edafio Technology Partners
www.edafio.com

Interview conducted by:
Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor
CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: Mr. Kinley, according to your site, Edafio provides intelligent technology solutions powered by people. What does that mean day to day?

Mr. Kinley: We are a technology services company that provides technical support for our clients to help them protect their business. That means keeping the systems up and running as they should be, that they are secure, and that all the applications are working like they are supposed to. We are that back-office group that helps the systems run so our clients can focus on their business and not on technology.

CEOCFO: Who is your typical customer?

Mr. Kinley: About two-thirds of our business consists of healthcare clients. We provide technical support for hospitals, as well as large and small clinics. The other third of our clients come from more diverse industries, such as banks, professional services, accounting firms, law firms, and manufacturers.

CEOCFO: Was the focus on health a deliberate strategy or did it develop organically?

Mr. Kinley: It developed organically. About seven or eight years ago, when hospitals had to move to electronic health records systems, their need for technology support just proliferated. We were fortunate to be in that space and be able to grow with them and provide that service.

CEOCFO: How do you help a client when they have an electronic system that does not quite do everything it should?

Mr. Kinley: Given growing uncertainty and complexity in technology, it has never been more important for businesses to have trusted advisors. That is the image of ourselves we strive to live up to every day at Edafio.

Far beyond keeping their systems operating, we are always evaluating their effectiveness and helping clients optimize applications. Our team of engineers works with application providers to achieve maximum results, which in turn, allows systems to perform better and enhance them in every way possible. This means we have developed expertise in working with outside vendors, and, over time, we have been able to use those systems more effectively.

CEOCFO: How much do you need to know about the regulatory side?

Mr. Kinley: We've developed a higher level of expertise in healthcare because of HIPAA and privacy regulations and had to familiarize ourselves with the guidelines because these systems have their intricacies. We have invested in a comprehensive healthcare consulting arm where we help clinics understand those regulatory and compliance systems.

Another critical differentiator that sets Edafio apart from other MSPs is our group of healthcare consultants that help the hospitals and medical clinics not only stay compliant but optimize those systems as well.

CEOCFO: *What do you look for in the people representing Edafio?*

Mr. Kinley: One of the core attributes or values of our company is to be committed to our client's success. We take that very seriously and seek that client focus. Customer-centricity, seems to be more predominantly a human quality that precedes technical competence. It is a personality trait not always found in engineers, but what is more important than being able to listen and interact with that client on a day-to-day basis? We work to continually demonstrate that personal commitment to our client's success.

We often work onsite at our clients' workplaces, and when we are not with them in person, we are in continuous daily communication with our clients. Almost all of our associates interact directly with clients in some capacity, so we hire people who innately fit our values and genuinely care. We find that we can teach technical skills more easily than we can instill a sincere service orientation in someone who just doesn't have it in his or her nature. This is the single biggest asset for us: people we are proud to put in front of the client and have confidence that they will represent Edafio's core values.

CEOCFO: *How do you attract talent, and do prospective employees recognize the depth of Edafio and value the tone of the company?*

Mr. Kinley: We just hit the 100-person mark in the last few months, so we are at 105 people today. Last year alone we added 30-plus people, so I feel like we are at the size at least in our region that we have some brand recognition, and people are starting to come to us. We have a two-pronged approach. One is we are heavily involved in college recruiting and college internships that have just been hugely valuable for us. At any given time, we will have five to ten college interns, and most of the time, those turn into positions.

"There simply aren't other technology firms that offer Edafio's comprehensive capabilities."- Kenny Kinley

We are very active at the college level working with students and doing more entry-level positions. From there, we train those people up. Some of our senior engineers and senior consultants today came through that internship program and trained up with us. That is one primary way. We also recruit top talent from prominent Fortune 250 companies. These individuals come to Edafio because they prefer the onsite approach we bring to our clients. Edafio has been able to retain an inclusive company culture, which is often missing in enterprise companies.

CEOCFO: *How do you attract customers?*

Mr. Kinley: We have been around for twenty years, and I would say the first nineteen years it has been very organic, client referrals, people you know in the community, friends of friends, that is how we have grown for the first nineteen years. We realized that if we are going to scale and become a regional player as we aspire to be, we are going to have to put some more focus on marketing and a sales force.

In the last year, we beefed-up marketing with a fulltime marketing director. We are building an expanded social media presence. I tell people that we have done more marketing in the previous six months than we have done in our first twenty years of existence. We are just at that tipping point if you will of trying to invest more in sales and marketing; and so far, it is working well.

CEOCFO: *How do you work with a new client?*

Mr. Kinley: In almost all cases, we start new relationships with some form of an assessment. Often, there is usually some kind of pain point with the client. It could be determining whether they qualify for our cloud solutions. We start by assessing their network capabilities and evaluating their staff. The evaluation frequently brings significant value to the client. From the findings, we can determine if the relationship is mutually beneficial for both of us. Historically, if you look at our best relationships, they typically started with some kind of technology assessment that met a specific client need.

CEOCFO: Are there services you would like to make available, and are there services you do offer that people just are not taking advantage of the way they should?

Mr. Kinley: We have two things that have really taken off recently. First is the cybersecurity space, which is the fastest-growing part of our business. We started with one person, but now we have a team of eight. The second is around the cloud. I think clients are trying to figure out what to do about the cloud. Do you do a public cloud like Microsoft Azure or Amazon Web Services (AWS)? Do you have a private cloud offering, or do you use your software vendors for the cloud? This is the part that I think is the most confusing for clients right now; they are just trying to figure out what to do. The term "cloud" has been out for years now, but a lot of clients are still trying to figure out what to do with it. We have been busy trying to help our clients figure out what the best solution is, because it is different for every business.

CEOCFO: What have you been called upon to do for your clients over the last few weeks?

Mr. Kinley: The biggest question we have gotten over the last two weeks has been helping them migrate to a remote workforce. Most of our clients have an office, and they have their staff there. The most significant request is how they can enable these people to work remotely, how to get them connected, get them a laptop, get them set up so that they can be as productive as possible working remotely. This is something we are trying to figure out **for those clients where we are frequently on-site.**

We have three locations, and we are onsite with a lot of our clients every day. We are having to use video conferencing and phone calls to keep the same level of productivity. I think that has been the biggest adjustment we have seen. Because our model is so client intimate, we have our engineers at our clients' site five days a week, three days a week, and even one day a week. That means we are having to modify our model and arrange video conferencing to support them remotely, which technically is not a problem. We can solve those problems remotely, yet we prefer the client-facing model. We are learning to adapt to a new model, and it is an adjustment for everybody.

CEOCFO: Do you typically help your clients with the hardware side of things?

Mr. Kinley: We do. We offer full-service hardware to our clients, from computers, laptops and PCs to servers and network equipment. In the past few weeks, there has been a shortage of supplies because many of our vendors' parts are delayed. We find that it is better to give them a one-stop-shop, so if a client says they want to buy something from us and they want us to set it up and maintain it, we have found that it is easier for them if we can provide the whole service.

CEOCFO: Is there anything you can provide which you are not currently?

Mr. Kinley: I think just continuing to provide more client application support, which can always be a challenge. Client applications change and we have an expertise in some of them based on client relationships we have had for a long time. We need to stay on top of things such as NetSuite, ServiceNow® or Salesforce. While we are functional in those and can help at some level, I still see that need for that specific expertise becoming more prevalent in our client base.

CEOCFO: What are you surprised we can do with technology today, and what are you surprised we have not figured out yet?

Mr. Kinley: After these last two weeks, I am surprised how functional we can be when working remotely when it is not one's standard model. You can do most things through video conferencing, phone calls, and email. I think we just accept the mindset that we have to be in an office. Personally speaking, I have been surprised at how functional I have been. It may be different or seem a little weird at times, but I still get my job done. I still talk to my team every day. That part has been a little bit surprising.

I am also continually surprised by how difficult some applications are to integrate with other systems. Whether it is in healthcare or any other system, applications often do not talk well to each other. It is unnecessarily difficult to pass data back and forth from one application to another — whether it is from a CRM system, an accounting system, or whatever. These systems simply do not talk or interact well. This seems to be an issue or obstacle no matter what the industry, and it surprises me that it hasn't been "figured out."

CEOCFO: What is next for Edafio?

Mr. Kinley: We are a predominantly Arkansas-based company. We have clients in Oklahoma, Missouri, and Tennessee. Nevertheless, we aspire to open an office in Tulsa or Memphis. Expanding our location into some of these other states is what is next for us, and we plan to do that in perhaps twelve to eighteen months.

CEOCFO: With so many companies offering tech services, why choose Edafio?

Mr. Kinley: The two things that differentiate us from other IT players. First, the core value of being committed to our clients' success. We want to be onsite, as business partners, and we always strive to help our clients run a protected business. We are not interested in being that "call-us-when-something-breaks" kind of provider... that is not our model. Instead, we want to be there, at the table acting as a virtual CIO, thinking and acting as if it were our business and responsible for its daily operation. This, more than anything, is what differentiates Edafio from our competitors.

Second, and also very important, is providing a wide range of services that are nimble — whether that is a private cloud offering, healthcare consulting, or a fully staffed cybersecurity team. Most of our counterparts provide one or two core capabilities. In contrast, we have many more. There simply aren't other technology firms that offer Edafio's comprehensive capabilities in our clients' backyard, with the bench strength to employ an onsite client model and a real commitment to their security, sustainability, growth, and success.

