

Unique IT Pro – offering Tailored and Personalized IT Services from Tech Support and Break-fix to Cybersecurity



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Interview conducted by:
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CEOCFO: Mr. Velez, what is the overall vision behind Unique IT Pro?

Mr. Velez: At our genesis, Unique IT Pro was about providing better technical customer service to businesses and consumers. We offer a wide range of tailored IT services. We can do everything starting from our foundation rooted in tech support and regular classical break-fix, up through our current focus and expertise in cybersecurity.

CEOCFO: What is unique about what you offer?

Mr. Velez: What sets us apart is that we can personalize our services and help our customers build their own technical currency. We will work with one individual's home computer starting with protection and maintaining support including updates and managing a lifecycle system. We advise the customer on when is time to redo the warrantee or when it is time to replace or upgrade the operating system. This tailored service is available for any device such as an iPad or tablet. We are available for any technical assistance the customer needs and we can scale that personalized service broadly to corporate operations.

Sometimes I say we are small enough to care but good enough to scale. If the person were CEO of a business, that could be our point of contact to helping them with their business, with helping them setup email or securing the computers at their business.

What is unique is that every customer of ours is unique in their own way and we are just the professionals that are going to handle their IT. That is the play on the name of the company. That was our mission over ten years ago and that is how I explain it. We are unique because every customer we support is unique.

CEOCFO: It seems you provide a large quantity of services; was that deliberate decision or more opportunistic?

Mr. Velez: Going back to my IT career, I was thrown into the fire where I was joining a team that really did not have the technical piece in place; the Windows support and Mac support. The team was more database driven. With their heavy

focus on the database, there was no one to handle the computers, hardware, and end users. So being thrown into that environment, I had to wear many hats. That is where my idea was born that there should be an entity out there to support other businesses with these same types of issues.

We started over ten years ago and as time goes on our focus has evolved. We were getting people onto Windows 10 and getting people onto the cloud or Office 365. Office 365 itself brought in new challenges of keeping the customer secure so that is where we started getting involved more with cybersecurity. As the business grows you face different challenges to adapt to while maintaining your customers.

CEOCFO: *How do you reach-out, and how would someone find Unique IT Pro?*

Mr. Velez: Most of our business comes from word-of-mouth. I attend many events to stay up to date with the technology, but I also try to visit different business networking groups. I am a member of BNI, and also a member of Alignable for Rockland County NY. I stay in contact with small businesses and try to raise awareness because in today's age it is about cybersecurity.

A lot of people might not know how vulnerable they are or that they are a target, so I try to just raise awareness with the small and medium business community. This relatable, and personal touch has been successful in building long term relationships with the businesses that contract us.

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CEOCFO: *What do you understand on a fundamental level about cybersecurity that perhaps less experienced people do not recognize?*

Mr. Velez: What you have to understand is the internet is treacherous territory, and I am not even talking about the dark web or dark business. The internet has infected websites out there and navigation can be precarious for users. Sometimes families or businesses want to keep their employees from sites that they should not be going to during business hours, so we have security that does that.

For years it used to be that the IT people would put a firewall at the corporate office, and everyone would be secure. Since the pandemic, the culture has shifted to Work-From-Home environments, so businesses have to expand their geofences to ensure security at those end points. It is critical that they understand what buzzwords such as "zero-trust" mean. Fundamentally, they need to know to trust nothing and validate everything. If people can at least understand that in today's computer world, you cannot just be connecting to WiFi at public places and think it is going to be safe. If they embrace a foundation of trust nothing, validate everything, they will be starting off on the right foot.

CEOCFO: *How do you help people recognize the challenges and what it means to protect yourself as much as possible?*

Mr. Velez: I rely a lot on stories that are out there and articles that are already in the news. This week, schools opened, and California's largest school district already got shutdown by ransomware. I rely on sharing those stories. I have a long list of stories from my own experience throughout the years. Ensuring that my clients are not identifiable, I will share examples of vulnerabilities and how we protected them from being infected.

I acquired a customer last month that was not my customer when they got cyberattacked, but now they are under our protection. These types of stories whether they are from our own experiences that we have been hands-on with, or those that are easily found in the news, I share those and awaken people to the risk that is out there.

CEOCFO: *What services do you offer that people are not utilizing as they should?*

Mr. Velez: Besides the basic things that they can do with their password hygiene and keeping their systems up to date which they can do on their own but obviously we will be more than happy to do, comes the next piece which is next-generation protection and that is in terms of malware protection. A lot of times, and this happens a lot with regular consumers, they will go to Best Buy, or Staples and they will buy a computer that is economically priced, and they do not realize that now that is their conduit to the internet which as I said is a precarious place. They do not realize what kind of protection they have. Sometimes it comes with McAfee or Norton, and those are the traditional antivirus that have failed in a way.

Their code has leaked many times and they are not doing the newer type of AI or machine-learning technology. That is what we offer, every customer of ours has that on their machine to start off protection. It is next-generation malware protection, AI driven and machine-learning. From there, we build upon that. It might be all a regular home user would need but for business infrastructures we start looking at whether they have hosted email, their data, it is all about doing an assessment and then making recommendations.

CEOCFO: *What is the geographic range you cover nowadays?*

Mr. Velez: We have customers internationally. A lot of people are working from home and from wherever they can get an internet connection. Our strongest client base is in the Northeast, but we have customers across the country including Virginia, Michigan, and Arizona. We are partnering with a training technical institution here in St. Petersburg, Florida.

“When I look at some of the underserved, low-income communities like where I grew up, I see young kids that idolize people in the music or sports industry, but I think they should look at technology as a way to break barriers and create opportunities for themselves and their families. That is why I always think about that one computer that someone might say is old and not good enough, but you could give it to a kid, and he could learn how to program.” Daniel Velez

CEOCFO: *Why is this the time for expansion?*

Mr. Velez: We are expanding because there is a lack of skill in the industry, not only tech skills but mostly for cybersecurity and the market demands it. The company we are partnering with here in Florida wants to focus on helping the community. They want to break down the barriers as a career in Tech should be based on potential, not privilege. This allows anybody in the community who wants to learn technical skills to have the opportunity to. The way they are doing it is that you can take the course and not pay tuition until you are actually placed in a job, so that will really help the community whether it is somebody trying to change career paths or if they are just coming out of high school and they want to jump right into learning a trade and getting into the working field. I think this is great and I am going to be involved with everything they do from a cybersecurity standpoint. This was a prospect that resonates with me, and I am excited about the opportunity to share my knowledge and skill set through such an innovative and community-oriented initiative.

CEOCFO: *How are you finding personnel for your basic service; what do you do to attract talent to your organization?*

Mr. Velez: I think every successful businessperson needs a little luck, not only for the word-of-mouth referrals and creating revenue but also on the tech side of having a strong core team surrounding me. I have worn many hats in my IT career, so I have been able to meet a lot of highly skilled individuals throughout my career and brought those people along with me. I have over ten years with my senior people. We have a strong partnership that allows us to have technical expertise when needed. I tell people that I do not know everything, but I know how to get the answers. I have great resources.

CEOCFO: *What have you learned from your career in early tech that has helped you be successful in business?*

Mr. Velez: The connection with people, I always say that you never know when you are going to meet someone down the line, and I think it shows in the people that have worked with me are now with me. The other thing is patience, I think I was quick to resolve things when I was younger. I think especially now with cybersecurity, one of the things I have learned is you do not quickly resolve anything because you have to preserve evidence. You may need to speak with people in the insurance realm, you have to maybe do forensics, so it is not about just fixing things. So, I think I learned

patience and assessments are paramount, but when I was younger, I was just quick to resolve and show people I had the knowledge to fix almost any issue.

CEOFCO: *Giving back to the community is important for Unique IT Pro. What is your focus and why is it important for you?*

Mr. Velez: We have done some things with YMCA, and donated equipment to Good Will. As well as Sponsored events put on by Sparc in NY. When I was growing up, I could barely get a computer. It wasn't until I went to the trade school myself using scholarship funding that I was able to get a computer into my house. I was the first one to bring one in and for all my cousins and family members, it was a big thing. I think about that and today most everyone seems to have a mobile phone that is more powerful than the computer I brought home. There are still barriers that can be broken.

When I look at some of the underserved, low-income communities like where I grew up, I see young kids that idolize people in the music or sports industry, but I think they should look at technology as a way to break barriers and create opportunities for themselves and their families. That is why I always think about that one computer that someone might say is old and not good enough, but you could give it to a kid, and he could learn how to program.

CEOFCO: *Would you tell us about recognition in the NextGen 101?*

Mr. Velez: I think Channel Partners does a great job; they survey a bunch of the MSPs. I do not know the percentage; I know there are a lot of MSPs in the world. but they send us these forms and we give them information about what we are doing and how the business is doing and what we are doing to differentiate ourselves and what our future ideas are. I think Channel Partners does a great job doing that.

I was extremely excited when I was on the MSP 501 list, which is among the most prestigious lists you want to be on, but the 101 gives back to small MSPs like myself that cannot really compete with the big organizations. It gives us a list to be on and be proud of it. I am happy to have made that list and I think that it also inspires me to continue to try to differentiate myself from the MSPs that are out there.

I also learned that in that community you can reach out to some colleagues in the industry, and we can be like a family where we help each other out. There might be an MSP that covers Texas, and I might need their assistance for a customer in Texas. It not only creates friendly competition, but it creates a great community for sharing.

CEOFCO: *What are you surprised we cannot do yet with technology?*

Mr. Velez: I am surprised that hackers are so successful. I think the fact that they can get people to click-on things even though people know they should not click-on things, it still is successful bait. All it takes is a sophisticated phishing attack to get them to click. I think it is amazing how it still happens, because we have the technology out there, AI and behavior-based technology that can shut down hacker attempts. When I saw the news about the California school, my thought was, what was the protection there and who was responsible for the protection? I wish I could be part of the forensic diagnostics so I could see if they checked all the boxes and still were a victim, or they were not thorough and hence vulnerable. That way I could understand more as to whether the need out there is the lack of products being offered, or solutions not being put in place, or if it is actually the adoption of the solutions.

If the adoption is happening and the attack is still working, then we need to go back to the whiteboard and create better solutions. If the solutions are out there and they do work but people are just not adopting them, then we need better communication around the business community and we need the government to step-in and give tax breaks to those who do take it seriously and protect themselves.

CEOFCO: *Why choose Unique IT Pro?*

Mr. Velez: You should choose us because we are unique, and we curate an amalgam of solutions and then we use the framework to build resilience. At the end of the day, we do care about our customers. We consider ourselves the best in keeping you and your business running efficiently and protected. If you want that intimate IT company that is going to grow with you and really care about making sure that you are not hacked and teach you the IT skills to protect yourself yet not let it eat up your time, then we are the firm for you. We will explain issues to you to help you understand and grow your knowledge base, but you can take comfort in letting us handle it at the same time. We can calibrate from individual home-based supports to the highly technical largescale corporate environments. As we say Unique IT Pro supports people with all their technology needs.