

THE ART OF EVOLUTION, aka When Opportunity Knocks

Directive created solutions to solve issues and help customers, which led to packaging those services to help other MSPs with *their* businesses. **By Chris Chase** • Photography by Charlie Samuels

ADAPT TO CHANGE or be left behind. That's a lesson I learned early on in life. When I founded Directive, computer use for businesses was still in its infancy. I saw the potential the IT industry offered and I knew it was only a matter of time before it exploded. Over the past 23 years, I have seen my company grow to 42 people and evolve in unexpected, but amazing, ways—and we are by no means done.

I started Directive before the managed service model was introduced to the channel. Our service area is extremely rural and many of our clients are up to an hour away. We were one of the first IT companies to adopt remote monitoring and maintenance. Given travel distances between our clients, it just made sense. By 2009, we were offering a full suite of managed IT services and had moved away from the break/fix model. To manage our operations, we decided to purchase ConnectWise.

One thing that frustrated me from the start was that our customers had to log in twice; first to access our website and then again to access the ConnectWise support portal. There had to be a way to unify the two. I began to develop an application to integrate our website and sales processes with ConnectWise.

Around the same time, I attended a ConnectWise user group meeting. Each table of attendees was asked to pitch a few interesting ways that we were using ConnectWise. I stepped out of the room for a moment, missing my turn. But I had brought along a new employee who leaked our new application to the table when it was his turn. Apparently, other ConnectWise users felt the

same frustrations we had, because when the three best ideas were chosen by applause, our application—JoomConnect—was met with a standing ovation. Even ConnectWise contacted us, asking to use it on the company's website. There was no turning back! JoomConnect was Directive's next step in our evolution.

As MSPs came to us to use JoomConnect, they also needed a website. Web design is a service we've offered since 1996, so we began building websites for MSPs. We were developing one-off, custom websites, but they came with a hefty price tag and took a lot of time. There had to be a more economical solution that my peers could afford. We created the Ultimate MSP Website solution, to use in conjunction with our JoomConnect integration platform, to meet this need. Our company had evolved yet again.

Working with other MSPs, we began to see how many struggle with marketing their business. Recognizing an opportunity within the channel, we developed marketing services specifically to meet the needs of MSPs. As an MSP, we have a true understanding of the IT industry and what it takes to succeed in it. We use Directive to battle-test all of our marketing services, allowing us to evolve our solutions as technology and managed IT change. Via JoomConnect, MSPs can now order marketing solutions such as content marketing, lead generation, sales automation, SEO/SEM, social media services, campaigns—and our newest offering, video.

Even though photography and filmmaking started out as a hobby for me, it became clear that the rapid rise in the popularity of video content for marketing was our next big

opportunity. Since rolling out this service, MSPs from all over the country have flown to our state-of-the-art studio in Upstate New York to record their videos.

Continually Adding New Skill Sets

With the introduction of cloud computing and the plummeting cost of hardware and software, the managed IT service industry has started to become even more commoditized. We've had to adapt and retrain our technicians to keep up with the changing landscape of business technology. Now Directive is on the threshold of our next big evolution: physical security. There is a growing demand for security-related applications. Physical security elements like alarm systems, access control, sprinklers, lights, heat, etc., are often controlled by a unified dashboard. We have already begun to build a model around that for our business clients.

Not only will we offer physical security solutions to local businesses, we are also building a marketing offering for MSPs that are interested in making the jump to physical security too. In addition, we'll provide training and consultation to MSPs that will help to facilitate sales, marketing, and support of physical security-related products and services.

Over the past two decades, I've seen many businesses close their doors because they failed to evolve. They resisted change and technology progressed past them. No matter how successful you are today, tomorrow is uncertain. You can't be afraid of change. When it comes to business, you have only two choices: adapt or fail. Embrace what comes at you and evolve!

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CHRIS CHASE, FOUNDER AND CEO
DIRECTIVE TECHNOLOGY INC.

Chris Chase Founder and CEO Directive Technology Inc.

FOUNDED 1993

LOCATION Oneonta, N.Y.

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES 42

WEBSITES www.directive.com;
www.joomconnect.com

COMPANY FOCUS Directive is a technology consulting firm specializing in technology implementation and management for SMBs. JoomConnect offers a variety of marketing and sales services designed for MSPs.

FAVORITE PART OF MY JOB Talking to customers and helping them strategize. I stopped billing clients two years ago for my informal consultation time, because it's what I enjoy.

LEAST FAVORITE PART Anything to do with HR or accounting

WHAT PEOPLE WOULD BE SURPRISED TO KNOW ABOUT ME My adult life had a rocky start; I was homeless at 17 and I am a high school dropout. Today, my wife and two sons also work in the business. Oh, and I like some Justin Bieber songs even though I'm 43.