

CMIT Solutions helps small biz with IT

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After 30 years in corporate IT, Plainview's Larry Schweitzer was ready for something different and ready to be his own boss.

He achieved half of his objectives.

At 55, Schweitzer was interested in investing in a franchise and thought something in the food business might be a good fit. Browsing at a franchise show on the Island last winter, he checked out a couple of fast food opportunities, but ultimately kept walking.

A short time later, Schweitzer found himself talking to Armando D'Accordo, Long Island franchise developer for CMIT Solutions, a Texas-based company that provides outsourced IT support for small businesses.

"I started thinking about the food business and working seven days a week," Schweitzer said. "Did I really want to be there all the time in case something happened?"

Schweitzer decided not. After putting up about \$45,000 for a franchise fee, Schweitzer added on another \$60,000 for working capital and opened his doors in April, taking in an area covering Levittown, Bethpage, Hicksville, Farmingville and Melville.

Working out of a home office, Schweitzer said his goal was to have 15 clients within a year.

"I've already got 13," he said.

During the past three recession-plagued years, CMIT Solutions added more than a dozen franchises in the metro area, including four in Nassau and one in Suffolk.

"[IBM](#) can take care of the Citibank's of the world, but there's not a lot of excellent IT support for small businesses," D'Accordo, the regional developer, said. "We're filling that need."

CMIT focuses on protecting systems, creating disaster recovery and constructing business continuity plans. It also can provide an 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. help desk and perform staff training. The cost per month ranges anywhere from \$500 to \$1,000, D'Accordo said, depending on the size of the operation and how much service is required.

Small businesses that outsource their IT needs seem pleased with the results. According to a recent survey by the business consulting firm KPMG, nearly 90 percent of respondents said they planned to maintain or increase their level of outsourcing.

If a person has some technical know-how, an IT outsource franchise is a good way to go, according to Tom Scarda, a Wantagh-based consultant with FranChoice, which counsels prospective franchisees.

“Small businesses know the nightmare when a computer goes down,” Scarda said. “CMIT is there to hold hands.”

Holding hands means developing people skills along with tech expertise, Scarda said, but there’s an even greater challenge for a tech outsource franchisee.

“You have to have a well-developed sales acumen,” Scarda said. “You’re definitely going to have to get out and sell.”

Schweitzer agreed that the greatest challenge he faced after jump-starting his franchise was letting people know he was in business.

“I had no idea about the full value of networking,” he said.

Soon he was a member of several chambers of commerce and was attending events, with referrals following.

D’Accordo said that as area developer he pushes the idea of networking and also has held events to get the word out.

“We’ve also used direct mail,” he said, but discourages cold calling.

If done right, and in the right location, Scarda believes a tech outsourcing businesses is, if not recession proof, at least “recession resistant.”

CMIT has proven it can not only weather the recession but thrive during dark days. In business 14 years, it has 126 franchises across the country. In the last three years, the franchisor has grown here from five tri-state locations to 30.

The future?

“We’re going to be the IBM of small and mid-sized businesses,” D’Accordo said.

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