CEOCFO Magazine

Q&A with Tom Coffin, President and CEO of Simply Reliable, Inc. providing a SaaS-based Project Management Software for Quickly Creating Proposals and a Desktop Software for Drawings and Documentation, creating Floor Plans, Wiring Diagrams, Cable Schedules and Labels

Tom Coffin
President & Chief Executive Officer
Simply Reliable, Inc.
www.SimplyReliable.com
Phone: 617-505-1570
Email: tcoffin@simplyreliable.com

Interview conducted by:
Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor
CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: *Mr. Coffin, what is the concept behind Simply Reliable Inc?*
Mr. Coffin: The concept is to make small businesses more efficient so that they can turn out more work in a shorter period of time using less resources. Our product is essentially a mission critical, enterprise level SaaS software for B2B solution for small businesses.

CEOCFO: *Would you give us some of the items that you are able to help your clients that are better, faster, cheaper; all the good things we want?*
Mr. Coffin: Simply Reliable offers two products smartOFFICE and designMACHINE. smartOFFICE, is an online enterprise software and designMACHINE is a desktop software for drawings and documentation. I will start with smartOFFICE. With smartOFFICE it is absolutely the fastest way to get proposals out to a prospect. We have a powerful set of features called Quickspecs, Choice, Packages, and Accessories. We provide customized versions of these power features to make it fast and easy for integrators to create proposals for certain manufacturers such as Control4, Crestron and Savant; these are brands in the smart home industry. The integrator simply clicks and chooses very quickly how many devices are in each room, so they can be added to a proposal. One example would be, on our YouTube channel, I give a demonstration of how I can build about a one hundred and fifty thousand dollar home automation proposal in about five minutes. A typical integrator might spend a day or a day and a half creating that. designMACHINE follows the same path, which is, when you look at complex jobs that are out there, be it the IT world or security or AV, many times you need drawings. You need floor plan drawings and you need wiring diagrams and you need documentation such as cable schedules, which tell you where the wires go and what wires you need. You essentially hook the system up in designMACHINE, which takes about fifteen to twenty minutes, and press a button and designMACHINE creates all the documentation for you. We have just signed an agreement with a manufacturer called Control4. They are one of the largest home automation manufacturers out there. They are a publicly traded company and they do about two hundred and seventy million dollars a year and they have about five thousand dealers selling their product. The agreement that we signed with them was to promote using our software in the business process for their dealers to increase their sales without having to add more dealers.

CEOCFO: *What did you understand that enabled you to create a system that is so efficient? Is it the technology? How were you able to create a system the way you have?*
Mr. Coffin: That is a great question! It really all comes down to business processes. The way this originally came about is that my co-founder Jonathan Knapp had an installation company. What typically happens with small companies is that when it is just you everything is running fine. As soon as you start adding people then you have to start managing and chaos ensues. He happened to be at a conference called CEDIA, which stands for Custom Electronic Design and Installation Association and he saw Michael Gerber speak, Gerber wrote the book The E-Myth. He engaged the Gerber Group and spent about two and a half years with them going through his own custom installation business, defining all the

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necessary processes to run his business. These processes included best practices so that everybody knew to do the next "right step", without lots of communication and getting rid of the water cooler talk and reducing emails. Therefore, he worked that out and he eventually built that into a piece of desktop software. I had used his software in a dealership that I had owned, and over a number of years of knowing each other I approached Jonathan and said, "I think we could truly take this out to the masses if we do a couple of things. The first thing the software must be in the cloud, online. Secondly, we have to make it much easier and break it out into role based plans. Essentially, the subscriber would just pay for the roles they need." We both were subject matter experts when it comes to smart homes and we were both subject matter experts when it came to process. Therefore, putting that together allowed us to develop a business process workflow that works for many trades, from custom-AV to pro-AV, IT, electricians and security installers. Any business that starts their business off with either proposing a solution or getting a phone call that something is broken and needs to be fixed based on technology can use smartOFFICE. That is where it came from.

CEOCFO: *Are businesses looking for a better way or is it more that they are happy to find out that you exist?*
Mr. Coffin: They are looking for it. The average small business uses about thirteen disparate applications, be it Windows applications or phone applications to run their business. Many of these software and apps do not talk to each other, so it ends up taking a lot of time to manage them and it is very expensive to manage them. Therefore, what many small businesses are looking for is a singular enterprise solution that will help them run their business. These are mostly small companies with less than fifty employees. In a perfect world they could go out and buy something like a NetSuite. However, they cannot afford $50,000 or $500,000, and certainly not $5 million dollars. Therefore, they are searching for the next best thing. That was how we decided to solve the problem. We did not want to be just one piece of a solution. We designed smartOFFICE to be the entire solution, so you can get in there, do everything you need for your business. When business owners see that they start to understand how much time they can save and how much more business they can do with the same people and time.

> **"smartOFFICE is a single software application that digitizes the entire business process. It manages people, products and money, reducing expenses, increasing revenues, speeding up quote to cash and improving cash flow. It is both easy to learn and to use. Our customers can achieve real-world savings of over $76K per year. Add designMACHINE to that for creating documentation and a small business can save another $20K in opportunity costs."- Tom Coffin**

CEOCFO: *How do you help the business owner overcome fear of change? How do you help businesses recognize that Simply Reliable can help a company move forward?*
Mr. Coffin: That is a great question. The fear of change is real and it is out there and it is one of the challenges. Many times you hear, "I would like to change, but I am too busy to change right now." Then you hear, "I would like to change but I cannot afford it because business is slow right now." When is the right time to change? We have made it very, very easy to switch over to smartOFFICE. We developed a three-step onboarding process that starts with a free trial. Throughout the free trial we treat them like a customer. The first thing that we do is what is called Zero Set Up. With Zero Set Up we load in all the data that they need, all the products that they need for proposals. We do that for them. This removes days, weeks, and months worth of data entry they would do. We manage their data on an ongoing basis, at no additional cost to them. Then we set up a meeting called the L1 onboarding meeting. In the L1 onboarding meeting our customer success reps work directly with the integrator and they do things like load their logo for them and help them pick out a proposal template, put the correct sales tax, etc. I call this the infrastructure of smartOFFICE. Now the system is tailored to their company and ready to go. Next we schedule an L2 session, an L2 onboarding meeting. The person who leads that takes the potential subscriber and they do their first proposal with them. Generally, it is a pretend proposal. They create a proposal and then we will go in and do a purchase order, we will do an invoice, we will schedule the work to be done and we will do the work order. This L2 session takes about an hour. Many times that is all the training they need. They realize they are engaged and ready and are able to begin using smartOFFICE in their business with little or no down time. The level of fear starts to go down. We back that up with hundreds of hours of videos on YouTube. Our customer success reps' mission is to nurture the dealer and help make them feel comfortable; whatever question they have, whatever need they have, they are there to sort that out and make sure that it is a smooth transition.

CEOCFO: *How are you reaching out to potential customers?*
Mr. Coffin: We do it through a multitude of ways. We have a proprietary process that we call 360 degrees of a prospect that I can't share. However, we utilize our large mailing list, combined with Facebook advertising, which has been quite affective. We of course do tradeshows. Then on top of that we do some content marketing through LinkedIn and through our own website.

CEOCFO: *Your pricing seems quite reasonable from what I see on your site. Are people a little skeptical, because it seems doable for almost any business?*

Mr. Coffin: They are. Sometimes a larger company will put you out of the running a little bit, because they see the pricing and think, "Well, it cannot be that good because it is so inexpensive." Now, the reason it is the price that it is; and I am not saying that it will stay there, because it will probably increase in price as we add features, we have priced software plans the way they are is to serve that market. We want to make sure we are serving the small business owner and we are not putting an onerous amount of weight on them financially to run their business. I always tell them, "Look, smartOFFICE should be something that you put in that becomes a profit generator. It should never cost you money." We also encourage them to buy less seats in the software and then add them on as they need it, as people start using them more and more you can always add them on and make your organization more efficient. When we started this company we built it to scale, it was designed to be a very large company, based upon what we were building. We essentially were building enterprise in a box. smartOFFICE is "business in a box". smartOFFICE is to business process what QuickBooks was to accounting. That is the goal. They should be able to open it up and just get going. It is affordable for any small business, as you mentioned.

CEOCFO: *What has changed in your approach as you have been working with clients? What have you learned from them?*

Mr. Coffin: We learn things every day from our subscribers. The question I always ask them, especially when they first come onboard is, as you start working with the software you are going to figure out things that you wish it did. What we want to hear is you calling up and saying, "If it only did this it would save me five minutes a day or it would save me one hour a day." When we get feedback like that we usually put those ideas into the software. Our subscribers are the greatest feature generators. Always in our minds and everything we do we are here to serve them. If we just push our ideas down their throats it is not going to help them with their business. I would say that is probably the single biggest thing that we have learned; we are really good at listening to our customers.

CEOCFO: *What do you look for in your support people?*

Mr. Coffin: The number one thing that I look for in a customer success rep is empathy. Empathy is the most important thing. These subscribers rely on smartOFFICE as it is a mission critical software. If it goes down they cannot do things like writing proposals or invoices. Always, always, always be empathetic. Always be on their side and help them get through their day. Obviously, they must have product knowledge, but we can very easily teach that skill. We also want them to listen for key information about what would help that dealer or that subscriber's business. That goes back to the features concepts. However, I would say that empathy is probably the biggest thing.

CEOCFO: *You mentioned adding features as you go along. What would you like to do in the future? What might be appropriate or is it too early to talk about?*

Mr. Coffin: One thing that we are very, very excited about is that this year we changed the whole paradigm about how you can do proposals. Most proposals that are generated are created in a PDF format. You can send it to someone; you can print it out or hand it to them. The world is going digital. smartOFFICE represents the digital transformation of small business. That is what we are all about. Digital Transformation opens up the whole ecosystem. It blurs the traditional lines between customer, dealer, manufacturer allowing them to work together in a much more smooth and transparent process. As part of the digital transformation, this year we introduced what are called Digital Proposals. Rather than creating a PDF, smartOFFICE automatically generates essentially a website that is the proposal. The prospect is sent a link and they can experience their sales process anywhere, it's all in the cloud. When they decide to accept the proposal, they can sign it, accept it and it then it creates a digital invoice. The customer can then put their credit card number in and pay that invoice. Our subscribers now have an ecommerce site where proposals and invoices can be viewed and paid. The customer has a client gateway where they can go look at those invoices and proposals and pay their bills. That whole client gateway thing will grow very large in that it will have other features such as a place to look at their drawings and a place to request service calls. What we are trying to do is create a much more intimate relationship between the end user and the dealer. To take that a step further, I mentioned our Control4 agreement a few minutes ago. What that is all about is essentially trying to get the dealers to be more efficient and to turn out more work in less time with less mistakes and so forth. We will be extending that that process to include the purchasing process. When you look at a manufacturer like Control4, they have a design department. Sometimes they need to do designs for their dealers. We have created a new feature called proposal sharing. This has not even hit the market, but it will come out in about a week or two. The idea is that a manufacturer, such as Control4, can do the designs, they can then press a button and hit share and share that design right inside smartOFFICE with a dealer. The dealer will open it up and then put all the other products in there that they need to put in that are not the manufacturer's products or some other manufacturer's products and then turn that over to the customer. This used to be a very "paper" type of transaction between the manufacturer and the dealer. They

might create a PDF and send it to the dealer and the dealer would then have to retype everything on to the proposal. This removes all of that allowing the dealer to instantly use that data. We has taken the ecosystem and brought it closer together.

CEOCFO: *Why choose Simply Reliable? Why is the company important?*
Mr. Coffin: The company is important because we are the first company and only company that can deliver eighty to ninety percent of a true enterprise level solution, ie: the most important features to run the business, that is affordable and easy to learn and use. Most large companies are paying hundreds of thousands of dollars and must have dedicated staff to manage their software. smartOFFICE is a single software application that digitizes the entire business process. It manages people, products and money, reducing expenses, increasing revenues, speeding up quote to cash and improving cash flow. It is both easy to learn and to use. Our customers can achieve real-world savings of over $76K per year. Add designMACHINE to that for creating documentation and a small business can save another $20K in opportunity costs.