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# Interview with the founders of New York Cybersecurity firm A2 CyberSecurity, LLC

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**Interview conducted by:**
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**CEOCFO Magazine**

**CEOCFO:** ***Mr. Powers, what is the idea behind A2 Cybersecurity LLC? What is your focus and vision?***
**Mr. Powers:** The idea behind A2 Cybersecurity came because we were frustrated with the overpriced information security services and software licenses in the industry. We met each other as software developers working at Barracuda Networks and decided to become form our own company. We are able to deliver a very solid product at about a 1/10th of the cost by using open-source software mixed with proprietary security definitions.

**CEOCFO:** ***What do you understand on a very basic level about security that perhaps others do not?***
**Mr. Powers:** Cyber security is actually very simple. It really boils down to one main thing, which is watching and monitoring the network traffic. If you monitor a host for all the network traffic coming and going then you can be assured about who is talking to whom on the network.

**CEOCFO:** ***Why does everyone seem to think it is so hard or pretend it is so hard to be secure?***
**Mr. Powers:** That is a good question. I think that much of the industry makes it more complicated because that helps them sell their product or service. Few companies have a good understanding of the technologies themselves, and this lack of information is taken advantage of.

**CEOCFO:** ***Do you find that people are skeptical because you charge so much less that you can provide a solid product?***
**Mr. Chalfin:** I feel that what happens is that either people are lacking in knowledge of cyber security or they already have something in place. We come in with a really complete package of product and we come in way under market value and some people, to be honest with you, are a little intimidated by, "Why is A2 Cybersecurity able to provide a robust cyber security program that is so much less expensive than other companies," and they become skeptical. The reason why we can do that is because our overhead is low and we have some people that have been involved in the field since day one who really know the ins and outs. We do not have a lot of fluff. We do not have a lot of managers and supervisors. We are a small company that can handle a large amount of cyber security. That is why there is an element of skepticism. We come in at a low price point with a very high delivery rate.

**CEOCFO:** ***Who is using your services? What types of organizations?***
**Mr. Chalfin:** Right now we have small banks, midsized companies and insurance agencies.
**Mr. Powers:** We mainly help financial institutions.

**CEOCFO:** ***Has that been a deliberate strategy or more opportunistic?***
**Mr. Powers:** We are going after the financial institutions because New York State is the sole state that instituted a cyber security law that is going into effect in 2018. There are certain types of exemptions and stipulations, but they are required to report to the super intendment of cyber security, have a security officer, which is called the CISO, Chief Information Security Officer. The CISO has to answer to the New York Department of Financial Services superintendent.

**"Our team of security analysts are former software developers and have access to source-code from security compliance software. This enables us to provide information security coverage at a much lower rate."- Louis Powers**

**CEOCFO:** ***Do you have to be registered or qualified in any way by regulators or is it up to the bank to choose someone to use?***
**Mr. Powers:** Yes, if you provide information security services in New York you must be a qualified and certified as an information security engineer. At A2 CyberSecurity our security analysts all have CISSP qualifications.

**CEOCFO:** ***How does a typical engagement work? What is involved with implementation?***
**Mr. Powers:** We deploy the services on a virtual machine hub. We deploy a physical server, physical hardware onto the client's network. We run the penetration testing internally and externally, and perform asset tracking and security information collections. More importantly, the physical hardware runs the intrusion detection system. For external penetration testing, we run that from out secure operations center that is based out in New City New York at an undisclosed location.

**CEOCFO:** ***Are potential clients surprised there is a hardware component when everything seems to be "cloud" today?***
**Mr. Powers:** You cannot get around that. There is no cloud: there is just someone else's computer. Therefore, they should not be surprised at that. I do not think anyone is surprised at that. If they are I would happily give them a lecture on why it is necessary.

**CEOCFO:** ***I would think it would be somewhat comforting to actually have something physical on premises!***
**Mr. Chalfin:** I would think, exactly as you said, many people are using deployment from the cloud mostly because it saves them money. It is inexpensive to use a cloud server and it is also very easy for them in terms of remotely doing things. We also use remote services as well, although we kind of like to get our hands dirty. We will go into the office and we will check out the network and make sure we can evaluate the network and get a topography map and so on. We really like to interact with our customers. We are not just looking to do something from far away. We like to really be concrete in what we are doing and I think that is having actual physical hardware. I do not have a better way of saying this, but it is like having something that you can actually hit with a hammer. To us it just makes a little more sense. For other companies it would really hurt them on a price point or economic standpoint. Due to our low overhead we can afford to get the hardware in for a very reasonable price.

**CEOCFO:** ***What might you pick up that other systems do not??***
**Mr. Powers:** That comes from our network intrusion detection system. This will scan traffic in real time and it scans the payload within the packet to test for known threats and identification. Therefore, if we see something like the activity that

matches a certain virus or a certain malware being sent out we actually see that traffic in real-time and we detect. The intrusion detection system will pick up ransomware activity, data theft and network attacks, that alerts our security analysts who then isolate the machine and perform incident response management.

**CEOCFO:** ***How do you get a foot in the door with potential clients? What is your marketing strategy?***
**Mr. Chalfin:** We are looking to get a client base in the Tri-State area and we would like to partner up. We would like to do a third party service if possible for other companies that are doing IT type solutions in that area. We would like to partner up with them and that would be ideal for us. This way if someone needs an IT department then we just deal with them and we can come in and we can satisfy the cyber security needs that are either regulated by New York State or perhaps other states. All of the breaches that have been happening of late are kind of a hot topic, even if you are not regulated by New York State, although I know that Louis Powers agrees with me when I say that other states are soon to follow suit.

**CEOCFO:** ***Are you getting referrals, are you knocking on doors? How do you get people to listen to you?***
**Mr. Powers:** We have contacts through other IT businesses that are spreading the word about us. We have done a public relations release. I think that is probably where you found us, I am assuming. We also have a sales team that will make phone calls to the IT departments of the types of businesses that we are targeting for our client base.

**CEOCFO:** ***What has changed in your approach as clients have started to use your service?***
**Mr. Powers:** The main thing that has changed is the amount of coverage that we provide. That is because we find that many of the clients are more interested in just the standard level of coverage instead of a very sophisticated level of coverage This allows us to just deploy the one physical intrusion detection system. I would say that we have branched off and instead of offering one plan; we now offer three different tiers. We have a standard, an advanced tier and an enterprise tier. The standard tier ultimately covers the

**CEOCFO:** ***Are you seeking partnerships, funding or investment of any kind as you go forward?***
**Mr. Powers:** Fortunately, the business itself is very sustainable. We are not going to turn down any fund raising or any type of funding, but we are not looking for it right now. That is because we just have such a low overhead and the market that we are in has the potential to be very lucrative.

**CEOCFO:** ***With so many companies in your sector, why choose A2 Cybersecurity LLC?***
**Mr. Powers:** Price and custom tailored solutions is the main reason. This is because our team of security analysts are former software developers and have access to source-code from security compliance software. This enables us to provide information security coverage at a much lower rate, and our nimble team is able to deliver a superior customer-first approach to information security.