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Business Solutions through the Microsoft SharePoint Platform

Keith Carter - *CEO*

StoneShare is a Systems Integration and consulting firm focused exclusively on the planning, development, implementation and support of business solutions centered on Microsoft's SharePoint platform.

Recent Awards:
Ø 2011-Profit Magazine-Profit Hot 50 (Fastest Growing Start-ups in Canada-Rank #32)
Ø 2012-Profit Magazine-Profit Hot 50 (Fastest Growing Start-ups in Canada-Rank #31)
Ø 2012-Exploriem-Bootstrap Award (Ottawa's Fastest growing Start-up-Rank #1)
Ø 2013-Profit Magazine-Profit 500 (Fastest growing businesses in Canada-Rank #111)

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: *Mr. Carter, would you tell us about the concept of StoneShare?*
Mr. Carter: In the beginning, my business partner Nick Kellett and I had speculated that SharePoint was going to be a technology that would broadly adopted by both private and public customers world-wide. SharePoint is a technology produced by Microsoft that allows customers to store, organize, share and access business critical information both quickly and easily.

At that time in 2007, we believed SharePoint would ultimately evolve to become a true enterprise-grade technology capable of replacing numerous, more expensive, technologies in enterprises across the world. We built StoneShare on the premise that implementing SharePoint properly would ultimately require the same planning, attention to detail and expertise that other technologies such as SAP and PeopleSoft required. We believe that there would be a demand for true SharePoint experts to assist large industry and government with critical and complex implementations and integrations.

CEOCFO: *How did you know?*
Mr. Carter: We didn't "know" that's for sure. That said, my business partner is a recognized SharePoint expert and Microsoft MVP who, by 2007, had already participated on complex SharePoint projects on three different continents. He saw first-hand the impact that the technology was having for the customers that were adopting it. Moreover, he could see how customers would ultimately benefit from engaging experts rather than struggling with their first time implementations. While it was a guess we felt that it was a well educated guess.

CEOCFO: *Would you tell about the company today?*
Mr. Carter: Today we are the company that we thought we could be. We're exclusively focused on SharePoint in every aspect of our business. We employ about fifty people in Ontario and Quebec. Our consulting engagements tend to be for large businesses and government and focus on the Enterprise Content Management aspects of the technology. Today almost half of our projects involve building complex Document and Records Management Solutions for our customers. We also have a fledgling software development practice within our organization that builds additional offerings that allow Data Centers to offer Cloud-based SharePoint solutions to their customers in more effective and efficient manner. As a small company we've enjoyed very rapid growth and we've been fortunate to obtain customers across Canada, the United States and Europe.

CEOCFO: *Would you give us an example of a typical challenge and something more outside the box?*
Mr. Carter: A typical challenge would be a customer that selected SharePoint with the belief that it would be somewhat "plug-and-play". Many customers have underestimated the level of planning and product-specific experience necessary to install and implement SharePoint solutions in a manner that will encourage adoption and improve the likelihood of achieving an ROI on their projects.

Our more advanced challenges are typically in the area of Electronic Document and Records Management (EDRM). SharePoint provides customers the ability to implement EDRM solutions that are more user friendly and cost effective than competing products. This has encouraged some customers to change from other solutions or implement EDRM for

the first time now that it's in reach from a cost perspective. However, the EDRM workload is perhaps the most advanced form of SharePoint project. It takes both SharePoint and Records Management experience to design and implement a solution that will provide the compliance that most customers require. This is a growing workload within SharePoint and today about 50% of the engagements we do are EDRM.

CEOCFO: *Are there any quick fixes for Share Point?*
Mr. Carter: I guess that depends on what the problem is. Because so many organizations have adopted SharePoint, a robust ecosystem of 3rd party product vendors (such as StoneShare) have evolved. These vendors have developed packaged software and these solutions allow customers to solve many common problems such as governance, custom workflow and deployment. It's important to note that while these products do help customers to avoid custom development to meet requirements they aren't a silver bullet and they do require expertise to install and configure properly.

CEOCFO: *Are there many companies in your space geographically and with your depth of service?*
Mr. Carter: In Canada, there are probably less than ten companies with more than a hand full of people that are focused on SharePoint exclusively. That said, there are a number of Microsoft-specific consulting firms that have a SharePoint component to a larger practice. Today, the limiting factor to competition in the SharePoint consulting space is the available talent to support more firms. We've been very fortunate to attract those that we've needed to support our rapid growth.

CEOCFO: *How do companies find StoneShare and how do you reach out?*
Mr. Carter: Most of our customers have come to us through referrals from previous customers. Our market presence in markets like Ottawa and Toronto has also created some word of mouth traction for new business. While we do have a website, I believe that the majority of our new business has combined word of mouth referrals with a traditional sales approach to result in sales.

"We've created a company that's laser focused on how to deliver value to our customers."
- Keith Carter

CEOCFO: *Are there special challenges working with different levels of government?*
Mr. Carter: The common challenge seems to be the way that procurement typically works. While all levels of government are somewhat different, the common approach is often to award the contract to the lowest bidder. While on the surface I should appreciate this as a taxpayer the reality is often that the lower price equates to lower value. As a business owner my occasional frustration comes from the fact that government, in general, doesn't have a well-defined method for assessing the value of their purchases.

CEOCFO: *Do you see growth in the government sector?*
Mr. Carter: It's important for a company to have a healthy balance of government business and private sector business as much as possible. As the economy goes through cycles I think it's critical to de-risk your business by having customers that are going to spend at different points in the cycle. To answer your question specifically, I don't necessarily see a growth in the government sector in the short term. That said, I do see the government being more stable than some private sector businesses in the short term.

CEOCFO: *Given the challenges of understanding SharePoint, how do you find the appropriate people to represent StoneShare?*
Mr. Carter: Finding talent has always been the greatest challenge to our sustained growth. As a business we've been fortunate to have a growing demand for our products and services that has resulted in an average revenue growth of 100% annually for the past five years. Our consulting practice requires people with a high-level of SharePoint knowledge to support that growth. In almost every marketplace that we participate in there is a shortage of SharePoint talent. We typically use tools such as LinkedIn and we have an employee referral program to encourage referrals. Most recently, we've included recruitment firms to assist us with meeting our demands. This has allowed us to expand our talent search to a national candidate pool and this has helped us a lot.

CEOCFO: What is the next thing for StoneShare?
The next thing for StoneShare is to provide more packaged solutions for our customers. We are definitely seeing a need in the marketplace for solutions that allow customers to implement SharePoint from a best-practice perspective. We think that our products do exactly that.

CEOCFO: W*hat is the timeframe?*
Mr. Carter: We have already started a separate team within our organization so not to steal from our core consulting business. That team has produced its first product, aimed at Data Centers, that provides their end customers with truly feature rich clout-based SharePoint solutions. The product is already in beta testing in Europe.

CEOCFO: *Why Europe?*
Mr. Carter: For two reasons. We were able to find a European partner that had a billion dollar business to truly test the product at the largest levels possible. Additionally, because commercial software development is new to StoneShare we felt it was important to test our new business venture far from our core business from a risk perspective.

CEOCFO: *How do you keep up with the continual changes and are you pleased with the direction of SharePoint?*
Mr. Carter: We are very pleased with how SharePoint has evolved as a product. I don't think Microsoft themselves could have predicted the rate of adoption that SharePoint has enjoyed. Microsoft makes keeping up with the changes somewhat easy. As a Gold partner of Microsoft's we are able to participate in conferences around the world that are exclusively focused on SharePoint and discuss the products direction at very technical levels. We also participate on numerous user groups that provide us with insight into how SharePoint is being used by customers and this helps us to better understand how StoneShare could bring value to them.

CEOCFO: *How do you spend your time as CEO?*
Mr. Carter: I would love to say that I'm primarily focused on the strategy elements of our company but that wouldn't be truthful. As a business we've grown up as an entrepreneurial company where the owners are very hands-on with the business. Five years later, both myself and my business partner Nick go in every day and work side-by-side with our employees on the day to day elements of running our business. I'm primarily focused on the customer facing elements of our business while Nick is primarily focused on project delivery.

CEOCFO: *Why does StoneShare standout?*
Mr. Carter: I think we stand out because we've created a company that's laser focused on how to deliver value to our customers. That same focus, has allowed us to make investments that bring many benefits to our customers and employees. The result is a company that has grown dramatically with each passing year.

BIO: Keith brings 20 years of IT Services specific experience in general management, marketing, and sales to StoneShare. A well-known expert in his field, Keith has sat on the Board of Directors for the Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), where he participated as a strategic advisor. He has also been a board member for the CATAAlliance and the Association of Professional Computer Consultants (APCC), where he contributed knowledge and experience related to contingent workforce issues.

Keith holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Western Ontario, and is a member of The Leadership Forum associated with Ottawa University's Executive MBA program. When not occupied with business responsibilities, Keith takes his passion to the track as a nationally certified instructor for the Porsche Club of America.

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