Q&A with Willie Kerns, President, CEO and Owner of SmartPath Technologies, LLC
an MSP providing IT Support to Professional Services Firms, Accounts, Lawyers and Doctors in Rural Western Kentucky

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CEOCFO: *Mr. Kerns, what was the vision when you founded SmartPath Technologies, LLC? What is your focus today?*
Mr. Kerns: We are actually located in a pretty rural area; rural Western Kentucky. Frankly, there just has not been much technical support and we have lagged behind technologically for a long time and some nearby cities like Nashville and that sort of thing. Ultimately, that is what got me started; it was wanting to bring technology to the local business community and local businesses, probably about twenty years or so ago. Fast forward to today; we are about a fourteen person MSP, again in a very rural city. Where our office is, our population is about twenty-eight hundred people. We primarily work with professional services firms, that being accounts of lawyers and doctors; far and away the majority of our clients. As most people in our industry, we are heavily moving to and being forced to move to just because of the landscape that there is now, towards security. That is the big thing.

CEOCFO: *I am guessing that people in your area like the fact that you are local. However, with so much being done remotely today, does it matter as much where you are?*
Mr. Kerns: No, it really does not. I think that is becoming more so the case on a daily basis probably that it even was a couple of years ago. Ultimately, it is almost as important now, the physical part of being somewhere is really for the sell side or the relationship side. In fact, even though we have many clients, I will say, within fifty miles of our office, many times we find that the only reason we are going out to see them is that they like to see our faces occasionally. Therefore, I definitely think that has evolved and evolved in the past five years is being evolved quickly. It does not matter where you are or where we are as nearly as much as it did, probably in 2014.

CEOCFO: *Would you tell us about how you provide security for your clients? How do you work with your clients and how do you know what might be right for any given client?*
Mr. Kerns: I think that much of it comes from things that IT folk miss a lot of times, which is the functionality of it. What exactly is the thirty thousand foot level, is the risk to the business, is the concern of the business, who in the organization might be a more likely target that someone else; those kinds of things. I think that many IT folk strictly want to approach it from a product side or a vendor side. I really think that we are at a stage where it almost has to become a philosophy and it is almost our responsibility to align our clients with that philosophy. It is the same thing that I believe insurance agents have done for a long time. That is to assess what your risk really is, what your comfort level is with that risk and then to ultimately provide whatever solution works for the company and works for the organization that you are working with. They may not necessarily care that someone loses everybody's last name on a junk drive, because it is a marketing list, it is a

mailing list, it is an email list. However, that same junk, drive down the street or a block down the road at the doctors' office, it is a really big deal! I think that in our position that we really have to work to be that business partner and to understand their business and help them understand what their risk tolerance really is and then help them abide and abate risk as much as possible within whatever they are comfortable within their tolerance guidelines.

CEOCFO: *Do you need to be on top of the regulatory issues, particularly for example, if you are working with a medical office or a legal office or do you leave it up to them as to what they are obligated to do?*
Mr. Kerns: I think that, again, most of the time our customers do not know and whether anyone thinks that they should or they should not, they simply do not. Most probably do not know how to take their computer apart. It is however at the core of one of the prongs of what we, as responsible IT folks, have to do. However, I also think that breeding that and making them aware of their compliance, but not scared of it, so that we can help them with it. It is our job to help them answer the questions that they may not know how to answer.

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CEOCFO: *Are you able to help your clients recognize the importance of good passwords and of not clicking on attachments and not clicking on links in emails? Sometimes the simplest things trip people up.*
Mr. Kerns: In this day and age IT people tend to have twenty-seven different passwords, and all of the different links with different requirements. I think that frustrates everybody and that many times that is what breeds many of the problems we have; many people using the same passwords and that kind of thing. Ultimately, it comes back to the folks that we are working with, the organizations that we are working with. They are not nerds. They are not IT people. Look at it from their perspective. To you do your job every day, let us say thirty years ago, if you had to remember eighteen codes that were all different and different lengths; that would have been totally absurd! We understand that as IT people, but to the majority of society, I think that still really is absurd. Therefore, what you ultimately have to do is help them sidestep that and help them make that a little easier. Passwords are a perfect example and I use that one a lot. I personally have a very similar password to a lot of sites, but every single password is different. You can ask me my eBay password and I could tell you what it is and it is not the same as anything else, but it is in a format that is very similar to the others that makes sense in my mind and that sort of thing. I think that actually helping users with the human element of it is the biggest thing. They do not hate us because we force password changes. They hate the password changes.

CEOCFO: *Would you tell us about the variety of services you provide for your clients? What might be some areas that people do not take advantage of that they really should?*
Mr. Kerns: I do not know that this is the case everywhere, although I have a feeling that it is. Far and away, the advantage that I think that we have and many MSPs and IT companies have is that we are in a lot of different environments, we are in many different offices and we see many different things. We see what works and what does not work. Inherently, no matter how much is marketing and how much we promote it, we have to continue to work just to not be the Maytag repairman. That is just the fee to get in the door. Ultimately, the service that we offer that actually helps our clients to be more profitable is consulting, having an officer who will come to you and be able to verbalize, "I do not know what the solution, I know that we have this clipboard with a piece of paper at the check-in desk and everyone has to come and sign their name and I do not think we are supposed to do that. I do not know what to do; I just know that we need to do something different. What do you recommend?" That is really where we are. Many IT companies in that space are providing those solutions. We are in the other doctors' offices. We know what works and we know what has not worked. That comes down to the people that we serve; it is hard for them to verbalize many times what they need and I think it is our responsibility to make them comfortable speaking plain English, to be able to interpret a little bit, to be able to understand what they mean when they may not exactly choose the right words. Therefore, ultimately it is the focus of using technology to make them more efficient and then hopefully more profitable in the meantime.

CEOCFO: *Do you do much outreach for new customers? Do many of your new customers come from referrals? What is happening and what is the strategy over the next year?*
Mr. Kerns: I can tell you this is core. I think that every business, regardless if you are in IT or you are selling ice cream cones on the street, is a marketing business. When you get down to it, every business exists to get people in the door, to pay them money to generate a profit. Therefore, I think that every business is a marketing business. One thing that a lot of MSPs do not do, which would serve them well, is to know their numbers. How many appointments did they go on and of

those, how many companies did they close? What is their close ratio, and what they are selling? You would be amazed to know how many people do not know their numbers. However, if you know that, you can do any kind of marketing. Tracking what is working and what is not working is really the biggest thing and the biggest catalyst. It is knowing your numbers and always doing marketing, reaching out to the community, doing direct mail, knowing who your dream one hundred clients you would like to have been targeting them.

CEOCFO: *Are you reaching out beyond your community or beyond the geographic region or is that not necessary; or at least not now?*
Mr. Kerns: We are, although while it may be possibly not necessary, to go to what we were talking about a little earlier, it is more acceptable, I believe, for people to be remote workers now. We do not have to show a face, we have not had to technically go on site for work. Even secretaries are working from home three days a week. Consequently, we have expanded far out of the Western Kentucky area. Many times our clients do not know that we are not local. One of our clients the other day said, "You mean you really are not in San Diego?" I said, "No, we are not in San Diego."

CEOCFO: *Are there any services you would like to add to the mix or you see the need eventually to include?*
Mr. Kerns: I think that while it may be as yet undefined or hard to verbalize, I think we can all agree that security is not going anywhere. Security is definitely changing. The one thing that I see many times and I worry that many organizations do not think about this, is that we stay focused on the cybersecurity and the firewalls and the antivirus and that sort of thing. However, you do not think about how easy it is to go buy a Comcast or AT&T polo shirt off of eBay for seven dollars, dress up, put it on, put a work belt on, walk into a dozen offices and say that you are working on the pole outside and you need to get into their equipment room. I will bet you that eighty percent of those receptionists will probably never ask you for another form of ID and probably seventy percent of them will let you through and probably open the equipment room for you. I think we are going to see a continued focus on security, but I think we are going to see that security evolve to not only include ones and zeroes if you will but to include something that it has for a long time; accessing both security cameras and surveillance. Also many physical things such as what is the contingency plan when the building catches on fire. Many people have not, up until this point, felt they have been able to do.

CEOCFO: *What surprised you as SmartPath has grown and evolved?*
Mr. Kerns: Probably the one thing that surprised me more than anything, and this may not necessarily be as surprising as much as it is being naïve in the beginning, is how many moving parts that the average IT company or MSP is involved in and touches. If you think about it, just the number of people with email addresses that change and people that get hired and fired; all of the things that we touch. Six or seven years ago we didn't think that we would have to devote half of a person's time just too managing automation and workflow. However again, it is the day and age that we live in. Therefore, I think that probably one thing is just the continual progression of tools to do our job and ways that continue to innovate ultimately delivered.

CEOCFO: *The SmartPath shows giving back is important for you. How do you decide where to focus your efforts? There are so many places that need help.*
Mr. Kerns: There definitely are! I think that issue that many organizations out there otherwise have is that they do not have a true, clear understanding of themselves of what their core values are and what their mission for being there is. SmartPath's mission for existing is to help those and to help people. Our core values align with that and we really drive everything by our core values. I think that many businesses really do not have clarity on that. However, ultimately the biggest thing for me is not that this is the best community in the world. The biggest thing for me is people who want to give of themselves. For instance, my seven-year-old whom you saw on the website, Brooke, she has the best friend and they have been best friends for four or five years and her best friend got diagnosed with cancer last year. It is a pretty serious cancer with about a forty percent survival rate. We started a go fund me account where we got close to $70,000 in donations to my little girl's best friend from people I have never met. Really, anything that can be a factor when it comes to giving back. This is a very unique industry in terms of how we interact, our peer groups and how we work together. It really says a lot when we have a community of peers who have the same career ultimately donate almost two-thirds of one hundred thousand dollars to a five-year-old girl that they do not know. That says a whole lot about the community and that is what I like to support.