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On N. Cloud Nine

Cirrus Networks is helping more businesses move to cloud computing, enabling their customers to reap the benefits of flexible agile IT solutions.

Images by David Phillips

After working for some of the biggest names in IT such as Dell and F5 Networks, Frank Richmond, Managing Director of Cirrus Networks, found a niche in the market and established his organisation, registering the name and domains five years ago. "I could see the way that IT was going: the cloud was coming, with SaaS already growing, and everyone was talking about it even then. Cirrus Networks is a solutions integration business that has a cloud play and is developing consumption-based IT for its customers. I registered the domains and the business name in the UK in 2009, but it was very difficult in London to try to set up a business like Cirrus. Coming out to Australia, particularly Western Australia, I saw an opportunity to bring Cirrus to life, and that's what I did.

"I incorporated the business here in 2012, and then brought some key

staff on board to help grow the business. Grahame Gilson, who has 20 years IT experience, runs our sales operations, and Mark Oliver looks after our technical presales area. Getting the right staff to support what we're trying to achieve here is key to our success. And we've grown from there.

"Having resigned from Dell, I joined the business on 1 June 2013 and Grahame joined in August last year. We've grown that sales capability since then with 13 staff in total, and are still growing."

The biggest challenge with starting a business from scratch was finding the right people for the organisation. "Staff are everything to a business, so for me, my staff are the business. If you can't get the right people around you to support your customers and deliver what you're all about, then you have a problem. The challenge is always finding the right people that fit the

organisation and the culture that we're trying to build here.

"The next challenge when setting up a business where revenues quickly grow to millions of dollars is getting lines of credit; you have to run the business really lean and be across your P&L, your balance sheet, and make sure that your payables and receivables are completely in order, as cashflow will kill you. I soon became more of an accountant than a salesperson for a period of time. It paid dividends, though, because we got the trust of our suppliers and our partners, and now we don't have any problems in that area."

Cirrus Networks prides itself on having a flat structure where everyone is empowered to make their own decisions. "We encourage our staff to continually evolve and improve through ongoing training. I have a couple of staff that have been doing the same job for some >

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years in other companies and wanted to progress but didn't feel that they ever could or didn't have the confidence. So we're trying to give them the tools and skills to reach their goals, whether that be a lesson in public speaking, mentoring, or formal training—it just depends on the individual—but giving them flexibility and support to help them achieve and reach their full potential.

"Showing staff that they are valued is important, and that's not just monetary; people like coming to work at Cirrus, and that's massive for us. I would hate to think our people clock in, work 9 to 5, and never think about work again, because we wouldn't be creating the right environment for them. Our staff don't do that; they're very passionate about what we're doing and building. If you can help people achieve what they want to achieve, be loyal, give them flexibility, you'll get it back tenfold. Just treat people the way you want to be treated."

As a technology business, being at the leading edge of technological advances is a crucial aspect of Cirrus Networks' philosophy. "Having the best technology at our fingertips and the ability to deliver excellent, cost-effective IT services with honesty and integrity is the value that our customers get from us. We're constantly evolving and innovating to add value to our customers; we need to do this continually."

Cirrus Networks works with a varied cross-section of customers, but addresses the needs of each organisation. "Some customers just want to buy hardware; but most customers are looking for much more and are looking to change how they use technology. They want to innovate, be more flexible and agile, but typically don't know how. So we engage, we understand their business, we help align their IT requirements to their business strategy and what they're trying to achieve, and we help them address that through the

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- Frank Richmond

best-of-breed technology solutions that we provide."

In order to provide market-leading technology solutions, Cirrus partners with the best hardware and software providers in the world. "I've worked with Juniper Networks since 1999, so I've known their technology for a long time. They're a trusted global vendor that I earmarked early as being a key partner for us.

"Partnerships are key to our success; having partnerships with customers and also the people that manufacture the technology is more than half the battle. We collaborate a lot and we run a lot of joint events ensuring that our customers are across the latest technology changes that are on the roadmap from our

"Cirrus has been a trusted partner of Juniper Networks since their inception. The deployment of Juniper Networks' networking equipment into a large mining industry customer has proven again that they're a highly trusted team and have the expertise to deliver totally integrated solutions." - Michael Zutenis, Area Partner Director—Australia and New Zealand, Juniper Networks

vendors. Being as remote in Western Australia as we are can be challenging because vendors don't always have people in Western Australia, so they look to us to be their trusted partner locally. So we have an excellent working relationship with companies like Juniper Networks and Silver Peak."

Cirrus Networks is growing rapidly, and Frank believes the company can expect further expansion in the coming year. "We've grown exponentially this year. We're going to grow 70 per cent this coming year. We are also looking at eastern states expansion, and we are looking at an ASX listing as well as a way of getting some additional funding into the business so we can execute our growth plans within ANZ and into Asia.

"We've already won business in Singapore with a global bank. This will give us the platform to build on in that region; there's a lot of business in Asia. And Perth is definitely more strategic to Asia than ever before; the Asia market is growing fast and we want to be a part of that growth."

The growth and success of Cirrus Networks is a testament to the strength of its people, and is expedited by the partnerships it has formed with the world's leading technology providers. By tapping into a niche, underserved market, Cirrus Networks continues to establish its position and to assist more businesses with optimised technology solutions. •

"In a short time Cirrus Networks have proven themselves to be a highly capable Silver Peak partner. Their breadth of experience, yet willingness to put forward innovative solutions, is delivering exceptional value to customers in a rapidly evolving market." - Brian Grant, Sales Director, Oceania, Silver Peak Systems, Inc



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