



Changes Converge



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This year, Converga celebrates its twentieth anniversary—and while the company reflects on its proud history, it is entering a new era as its CEO decides to move on to new opportunities.

Images by Scott Ehler

Following seven years of successful growth and expansion for Converga, a business process outsourcing company, Brian Roberts is stepping down as CEO to take the top position at Couriers Please, another company within Converga's parent company, New Zealand Post Group. He recently caught up with *The CEO Magazine* to discuss the highlights from his tenure and where he hopes to see the organisation moving forward.

The CEO Magazine: Wrapping up your seven-year tenure as CEO of Converga, what have been some of your proudest moments with the organisation?

Brian: Over the past seven years, Converga has experienced great success. Key moments driving our success include the Philippines initiative where we moved our validation services to an offshore solution in Manila. We set up our own company and developed that into a shared service capability. From initially commencing operations in the

Philippines four years ago, today we have more than 250 employees in Manila. We're really proud of the quality of the people, the culture, our high engagement, low turnover, and a great solution that the team has put together over that four-year period now servicing Australia, New Zealand, and US customers 24 hours per day.

Another significant moment for me was when we integrated the New Zealand business. Converga New Zealand was independent from Converga Australia, although owned by New Zealand Post. The New Zealand business had about 300 employees and 50 sites across New Zealand. Over the course of nine months, we integrated that business to become Converga Group.

Our most recent expansion came with the Speedscan acquisition in February 2014. We decided to fast-track the integration, and by July we had relocated 100 per cent of our physical premises throughout Australia and New

Zealand; the Philippines will be completed by the end of this year.

When you talk about pride, I guess it's pride in my team and their ability to take the opportunities we have had over the past few years and make them a reality. We looked at every one of those changes beforehand and tried to imagine what it would look like afterwards. I've been wowed by the success, speed, and ease with which the team has been able to take on and produce better results than we imagined, without losing customers, and adding to the culture of the organisation.

Throughout your tenure, you've seen significant growth here and internationally. Can you highlight how this growth came to fruition?

Growth, for me, comes about through developing and retaining customers. Historically, operating solely in Australia, we had about 40 customers that were very large blue-chip companies and the federal government. While we were very strong in the financial, banking, and insurance sectors, as >

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well as the federal government, we were exposed as an organisation because of a small number of very large customers. What we were providing were highly customised solutions that would take 12–18 months to sell, develop the solution, and then implement. Our vision was to go broader and global, so in order to do that we needed to get away from highly customised, complex solutions and move to configurable solutions.

We'd been particularly successful in accounts payable and digital mail, so we needed to base these solutions off repeatable platforms that were configurable. This opened the market up from just the Fortune 100 companies to a much broader base. The broader market was able to take advantage of document-processing solutions that were quicker to implement, easy to configure, and at a lower cost while still taking full advantage of the benefits of implementing process improvements. As a result, we went from 40 very large customers to 250 customers in the space of a few years.

You're also responsible for Converg's increased engagement, internally and externally, as well as its heightened focus on customer needs. How did you introduce these changes?

We offer both physical solutions and digital solutions, so in many instances we're operating outsourced solutions inside our customer's premises, running their mailrooms, their concierge, their records management. When I first visited our employees on customer sites, they didn't really know who we were and what we did; we were more like a name on a payslip. They identified more with their customer culture. So we recognised that what we needed to do was to bring these people on board, get them engaged, and create opportunities within our organisation.

We did an external IBM Kenexa Engagement Survey, which is a global survey of about 68

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Future Plans

Paul Bellette, new Converg CEO, discusses his aspirations for the company and his plans for the business.

"Converg will continue to focus its future around delivering our 2014–2017 plan. Our vision to be our clients' business process partner of choice, and our mission of innovating with the best people, process, and technology, remains. Underpinning our plan is our key strategic focus areas covering our people, customers, growth, profit, and sustainability.

"Through Brian's leadership, we have been delivered a fantastic company with a fantastic team that, through our continued focus on what we do best, will just get better and better.

"If you asked me how does the future look, we would want to be able to say: Converg is a customer-focused organisation where our employees say 'It's a great place to work' in their conversations with friends and family. Our market leadership position as a leader in BPO has been cemented as we continue to deliver increased shareholder value. Overarching all of this is the fact that Converg is a globally responsible business.

"The future—we are looking forward to it."

questions covering all aspects of employee engagement. When we first conducted the survey, we were in the bottom 4 per cent of companies globally. So we put a number of programs in place focusing on rewards, recognition, training and development, and values-based recruitment. We also started up our One Team program. For every one of the last six years, we've incrementally improved in every one of those 68 questions. So it wasn't as though we went forward in some and back in others; we just pulled the whole company up.

One of the most satisfying things I did was an annual roadshow event where I visited every Converg site. We now have 140 sites globally, and I give a small presentation to each site. Last year, I turned it around and asked every one of those sites to present to me, either on employee engagement or a process improvement that they could control within a site. Initially, they were very daunted by the CEO coming to their site and having to present to me, but once they latched onto a topic, it was just amazing and probably one of the best things I've done. It really empowered the people.

How important is customer satisfaction to your company's ethos?

It is critical for the success of any business. We've always been highly customer focused. We've got a pretty enviable customer satisfaction rating running at about 92 per cent. In New Zealand, there is an external survey that we run called NPS, or Net Promoter Score, and we're ranked world class. It's a global survey, and I believe we're ranked around the level of Google and Apple. So customer focus has been endemic in the organisation and is one of our key values ingrained in our culture.

How does Converg help businesses achieve greater sustainability and paperless offices?

We improve our customers carbon footprint by improving processes and through paper to digital conversion. Converg conducted two life cycle analyses on two of our solutions, Digital Accounts Payable and Digital Mail, and we proved that for every million pages, we could save 27 tonnes of CO2.

In addition, we have put a number of internal processes in place

reducing our paper consumption by 75 per cent, waste-to-landfill by 70 per cent, and we have a target for all internal processes to become paperless within the organisation by 2015. Customer engagement and awareness programs have been rolled out, and we continue to educate our customers around what we are doing for the environment.

Six years ago, we joined the New South Wales Government Department of Environment's sustainability program. We were the first company to gain bronze partnership status with the department, first to be silver, and we were first to achieve gold status. With more than 600 companies involved, Converg is leading the charge on the sustainability front.

It's not something that we get on our soapbox about. The employees have really latched onto this. In the 68-question engagement survey, the question 'Are we serious about the



environment and the community?' is always our top performer, so it's been the glue for us with regard to employee engagement as well.

What future goals and direction would you like to see Converg set for the future?

I've got a bit of a laundry list, but it has retained focus on customer satisfaction. I think we've got innovation in our DNA now, so I believe that's already at the grassroots level. Maintaining a focus on people and engagement, developing our people and enabling them to succeed; also, maintaining operational excellence. I think the people within Converg would say

we're a caring company; we care about our people, our customers, and the environment, so I would really love that to be a key focus going forward.

We've always had a focus on growth, and we've never been complacent. If we're successful, we don't dwell on it; we celebrate it, but we get on to what's next, which is also part of our culture. We've got a shareholder that recognises the culture we've built. Also, typically, what we say, we do, so the board is incredibly supportive. Finally as I tell all of my staff, surround yourself with great people who are passionate, driven, customer focused and have the same values of the organisation. •

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