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Forecasting SUCCESS

Weatherzone is Australia's largest private weather-services company, combining meteorological expertise with an in-depth understanding of operations across a range of industries. The company focus is on helping businesses minimise risks and make profitable management decisions based on accurate weather information.

Images by Scott Ehler

"Though Weatherzone is currently the leader in its field, there's no doubt the market is getting more competitive. We have a strong technology base, led by highly skilled meteorologists and developers."

- Charles Solomon

In the 15 months since Charles Solomon became CEO of Weatherzone, he has introduced a number of exciting initiatives to develop and expand the company. His passion for providing accurate, tailored solutions to businesses across Australia is matched only by the business acumen he implements to maintain Weatherzone's position as Australia's leading weather-services company.

Weatherzone does not just offer accurate forecasts across the country: the company is committed to providing individualised, value-added products to its clients. "The Bureau of Meteorology is a key supplier of data: we take that data, and then add further value by employing advanced forecasting and modelling capabilities to provide even more accurate forecasts and services," Charles explains.

"Though Weatherzone is currently the leader in its field, there's no doubt the market is getting more competitive. We have a strong technology base, led by highly skilled meteorologists and developers. As a result, our main challenge is to work with our team to ensure the product we develop not only has a solid scientific basis but is also commercially applicable."

Charles's professional background places him in a strong position to oversee the progression of Weatherzone's cutting-edge modelling technology, and helps the company to commercialise its offerings. Before Weatherzone, Charles led engin, a pioneering telecommunications company specialising in voice technology and internet telephony. "As a B2B and B2C company with a strong technical base, Weatherzone is actually very similar to engin. I found I had many transferrable

skills which I could carry over into my role at Weatherzone."

Charles is implementing three key strategies to keep Weatherzone at the top of its field. The first is to maintain an edge in areas where Weatherzone is already leading. "We have to keep advancing in areas where we are already strong—such as weather forecasting, modelling, and alerting—as well as making those products even more useful to our customers' day-to-day operations," Charles explains.

As well as driving innovation in weather technology, Weatherzone is committed to understanding its customers and providing them with the best service possible. "Our focus is on enhancing areas where we can be very competitive, where our services are highly valued, and where we can continue to develop the benefits that we bring to our clients." ›





Weatherzone caters for customers from a huge range of industries, including mining, aviation, energy and utilities, and media. As such, Charles ensures the company keeps a finger on the pulse of industry-specific demands. His approach is to make sure Weatherzone has the right people in their product development and sales teams.

“A lot of our new product ideas come from our customers, so we need to make sure that our sales people are interacting with our customers at the right level, and continually looking for ways to improve our service.”

“Of course, customer service is really a key value for us. Every one of our staff knows that the reason we’re here is to serve our customers. We could devote all of our time to fine-tuning and developing our forecasting models and all of the other tools that allow us to do such a great job. But unless those tools are used by our customers, and unless we provide

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our customers with tremendous service day in, day out, then we will find that our services will stop being used or that our competitors will make inroads.”

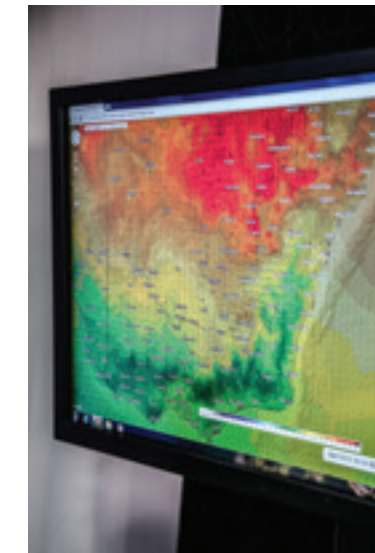
Another of Charles’s strategies revolves around teamwork, ensuring that the team understands the company’s goals and is aligned with the board. “The best way to promote effective teamwork and collaboration is to have a clearly articulated strategy, and to ensure that the rest of the team supports that strategy. We have discussions, workshops, and strategy development sessions which include both the Weatherzone team and the board, to make sure all the major stakeholders are aligned.”

According to Charles, effective communication and personal commitment are must-have tools in any CEO’s inventory. “From a leadership perspective, a key indicator is to demonstrate your commitment to your

responsibilities and your team. The best way to do that is by ensuring that your actions match your words.

“I try to always clearly communicate what we’re aiming to achieve, and what everyone’s roles will be, including my own. That’s how you show you can be relied on, even when there are difficult decisions to be made. People respect leaders who demonstrate by actions that they are committed to the company and the team.”

Charles’s third strategy for Weatherzone is to invest time and effort in areas of growth. “One way Weatherzone keeps up to date with the latest scientific advances in meteorology is by building and maintaining relationships with leading companies and organisations all around the world. We look for collaborations wherever we can find them, and are willing to work with other dedicated weather and technology groups in the development of tools and services.



“There are many ways we can assist our clients by alerting them to incoming lightning, especially in industries like aviation or mining. Of course, a major consideration for many businesses is health and safety—where our alerting services are key. We can also help customers improve operational efficiency by giving them the tools to schedule downtime and maintenance to coincide with inclement weather. To this end, we look forward to launching the Weatherzone Total Lightning Network in early 2015.”

Charles anticipates that, if the expansion is finalised, Weatherzone’s approach will be to train the local team on the company’s products, and assist them in developing their sales process. “After that, we expect that they’ll be pretty independent in utilising the tools and products that we provide for them,” Charles states.

In the event of a successful expansion, Charles is anticipating both rewards and challenges. “From a managerial perspective, we’ve got a very good working relationship with the local management team, and they really value the additional tools, products, and services that we have to offer.”

According to Charles, the key challenges will predominantly centre on ensuring effective communications and managing the technical delivery challenges. “We need to make sure that our applications work in that new environment. There’s a substantial technological component to taking in a large amount of data from another weather service overseas, which is what we plan to do, and then delivering that via our dashboards and interfaces.”

The future is bright for Weatherzone as it continues to respond to businesses’ individual requirements and provide the innovative solutions they need to function efficiently and effectively. •

“Currently, we’re working with a company called Earth Networks, which is the leading weather and lightning-sensing company in the world. They have close to 10,000 weather stations in place, alongside a lightning network of over 800 sensors globally. They are a key partner of ours in the development of our lightning network in Australia. We use some of the products they supply, and we also team up with them to co-develop lightning-related products.

“We develop products with Earth Networks to help our clients with several aspects of their businesses. One example is Dangerous Thunderstorm Alerts, a one-of-a-kind product in Australia, which effectively gives 20 to 30 minutes advance warning against approaching dangerous storms. Lightning alerting is a key area where we seek to add value for our customers.

When he spoke to *The CEO Magazine*, Charles was also overseeing plans to expand the company overseas. “We’re in the process of investing in an offshore weather services company, and they’ll be our partner for expansion into new territory,” Charles says. “The company hasn’t really developed in-house forecasting models at this stage; their focus so far has been on their IT and delivery systems.

“We foresee that the relationship will involve Weatherzone as a major shareholder, and, going forward, we will provide them with access to our meteorological capabilities, including applications, models, and forecasts. This arrangement will allow Weatherzone to ingest the local meteorological data and deliver value-added products to customers in much the same way that we do in Australia.”

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