



New England VAR Sets the Standard in Compliance



By Michele P. Warren

Every spring, The Boston Globe polls thousands of employees across the state to gauge their attitudes about the companies at which they work.

The survey covers employee perspectives on management, pay and benefits, company direction, engagement, and more, with poll-takers evaluating statements such as “I have confidence in the leader of this company,” “This company encourages different points of view, and “This company motivates me to give my very best at work.”

The result is a list of 125 “Top Places to Work in Massachusetts,” and there’s one regional company that’s made that list for six years running so far.

Yet being good to employees isn’t all this organization, which wishes to remain anonymous, is doing right. It’s also staying on the cutting edge of technology, thanks to its relationship with Cooperative Systems, a solution provider based in Windsor, Conn.

While the alliance between the two companies isn’t a new one—Cooperative has acted as the customer’s outsourced IT department for about 15 years now—the solution provider has been working overtime of late to fine-tune and secure the end user’s payment card systems.

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With old-fashioned credit card swipe machines becoming obsolete, card transactions are being processed more frequently over computer networks. Businesses seeking to make the transition need to do two things: comply with the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS) and add a new layer of security to their data networks.

Cooperative took on the latter task first, implementing “a continuous security monitoring platform across the organization,” which runs numerous locations throughout the northeast United States, according to Scott Spatz, vice president of the VAR. “The goal is to analyze all of the data and traffic that traverses the network for patterns of malicious [activity].”

Spatz said the customer didn’t miss a beat in the course of the monitoring solution’s deployment. “It was simply a matter of installing some software, which we did in real time and transparently to the end user,” Spatz said. That software collects data, which is evaluated at Cooperative’s network operations center (NOC), and “alerts us if there’s an issue,” he added.

Currently in phase two of the project, Cooperative is taking steps to make sure the client remains compliant with PCI DSS. “Companies have to abide by certain rules and regulations according to PCI DSS, just as healthcare businesses have to do with HIPAA,” Spatz said. “Not only do you have to do certain things to protect your network; you have to verify that you’ve done those things.”

Cooperative is an expert at helping companies in an array of vertical markets achieve compliance with industry and government standards and regulations. Spatz defines the solution provider’s bread-and-butter client base as “any small business with 20 to 100 employees that uses technology in a strategic way to move its business forward and doesn’t have an IT staff.”

“Today, it’s all about our ongoing relationships with clients,” Spatz said. “We take the burden of IT off their hands and act as their strategic partner.”

The solution provider (2015 SMB 500 No. 30), which has been in business for more than two decades and expects to generate \$4.5 million in revenue this year, got started in a basement and made a name for itself by offering break-fix services. Cooperative has since transitioned into the managed services business. “Today, it’s all about our ongoing relationships with clients,” Spatz said. “We take the burden of IT off their hands and act as their strategic partner.”

That mission statement has taken Cooperative far, helping it achieve a compound annual growth rate of nearly 100 percent from 2012 to 2014 and secure its top 50 status on distributor Ingram Micro’s list of top-performing solution providers.

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The Ingram Micro SMB 500, compiled by Ingram Micro's Business Intelligence Center and U.S. SMB Business Unit, and business strategy firm The 2112 Group, recognizes the sustained growth and business performance of SMB-focused channel partners.

This year's fourth annual Ingram Micro SMB 500 shows the group growing at a compound rate of 42 percent, with the highest-ranking channel partner posting a three-year annual growth rate of 266 percent. The annual ranking is based on the performance of more than 20,000 small-business solution providers operating under the Ingram Micro umbrella, and shows partners growing at rates three to four times the channel industry average and well above the channel average for SMB-focused resellers.

Given Cooperative's plans to keep helping customers leverage IT to benefit their businesses, chances are good that the solution provider will stay on its high-growth track.

For this client in particular—this Top Place to Work—Cooperative's payment card monitoring and compliance solution spells peace of mind and an enhanced customer experience. The client's own customers can rest assured that their credit card information is protected, and that paying for their purchases—whether in person, online, or remotely—will be as convenient and easy as possible.

ABOUT the Ingram Micro SMB 500 Program

Ingram Micro SMB 500

The Ingram Micro SMB 500, facilitated by The 2112 Group, tracks and studies the performance of the top U.S. solution providers in the Ingram Micro network servicing small and mid-sized businesses to provide actionable intelligence for improving sales, revenue, and profit of all companies in the go-to-market value chain.

For more information about the Ingram Micro SMB 500, visit www.IM-SMB.com/smb500.

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The 2112 Group

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