

Soundoff Computing

SITUATION

Ofer Shimrat established Soundoff Computing (www.soundoffcomputing.com) in San Diego, Calif., in 1992 as an IT company that developed databases, applications and process management; but today the larger proportion of his business is networking, most of it relating to Microsoft Windows Small Business Server 2003 (SBS 2003). "I design and build several different applications for different industries and now serve up the network, like SBS 2003, with the app," he explains. "Or my customer has an existing line-of-business application that I customize and further leverage with a new networking environment." In addition to SBS 2003, Shimrat implements Microsoft Windows Server 2003 and Microsoft Exchange Server 2003 for larger clients with multiple branch offices. While Shimrat initially sought a way to grow his application development skills into a thriving business, he's discovered that SBS 2003 is leading the way for his growth as an IT professional and entrepreneur.

Partnering often with San Diego-based Computer Plus One, which sells SBS 2003 to small businesses, Shimrat is helping small-to-mid size businesses emulate large companies, providing such features as offsite access to files through SBS 2003's Remote Web Workplace feature and flexible e-mail capabilities. He says his business is surging as small businesses demand affordable, integrated solutions like SBS 2003.

"SBS 2003 is the fourth generation of Microsoft Small Business Server," Shimrat notes, "and it's a mature product that just works. Microsoft has done a very good job of incorporating its technologies into this version. We go into a business with the mindset that we'll implement every feature of SBS 2003 so a small business customer can be on par with what enterprise people are doing for a fraction of the cost, with a system that is both robust and easy to maintain." In addition, Microsoft partners have the opportunity to grow their SBS 2003 business as clients learn the value of upgrades, expert maintenance and customized services.

Shimrat's success in dealing with customers derives to a great extent from his efforts to understand exactly what the customer needs and how SBS 2003 will function within the customer's environment. In many cases, the custom database application he developed or the line-of-business application already being utilized benefits greatly from the new networking environment, with such features as targeted SharePoint Web parts, public folder contact integration and fax server capabilities, among others.

SBS 2003 resolves virtually all customer "pain points," because it integrates many productivity-focused and security technologies into one comprehensive solution. "The product sells itself," Shimrat says. "And we understand what the features are, the multiple layers that make SBS 2003 unique. You can't be just an expert in Windows 2003, Active Directory, Exchange, hardware optimization or SharePoint—you have to be comfortable with the core technologies in SBS 2003 to be able to advise a company on what will help them. I ask them questions like, 'What security groups will we create?', 'How will your mobile workforce interact?' 'Is your Internet pipe adequate for your needs?' I plan ahead and work to educate the client."

With SBS 2003, customers can allow Shimrat to view and manage their computers from his own office to resolve problems without traveling to the client site. This feature lets partners respond quickly to customer needs without the time and cost involved in traveling to the customer site – a capability that's good for the customer and partner alike.

Clients also appreciate Shimrat's care not to interfere with the customer's business operations during installation and the meticulous attention given the hardware platform for the new server, workstation and network equipment. "We plan ahead and are able to begin an SBS 2003 installation on a Friday afternoon as people leave the office, work through the weekend using project management best practices, and they're up and running on Monday morning in a completely new – and much more productive – work environment. With management support, we ask that on Monday afternoon all staff sit through a one-to-two-hour session where we review and train users on the top features of their new network."

RESULT

Shimrat says all of his business derives from word of mouth, with no need for advertising. Today, with word spreading about his SBS 2003 and application-

development capabilities, Shimrat spends much of his time planning, building and installing SBS 2003 servers and their unique and targeted network environment. "I'm consistently growing 25-30 percent a year in networking, but this year I may double my networking revenue," Shimrat reports. "In 2004, my networking business eclipsed my database business for the first time. By 2005, 70 percent of my work was network related."

Shimrat advises that planning is the key to success with SBS 2003. "I want to give my customers full capability; but to do that, I require information from them: who needs to fax, how they will access information remotely, who needs to print, etc. In other words, I make the management develop a flowchart that explains their business, and then I translate that into technology. By understanding my customers' pain points and addressing them with SBS 2003, I have built a successful business and earned the appreciation of many businesses in my community."

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