

ROCHESTER

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Behind the Rochester Top 100:

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Business stays abreast of change

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In 1989 Joe Oster ventured out of corporate America and founded NetWorks, Inc. They merged with Structured Technologies in 2001. His company is in the business of data center solutions and IT services. Its services spread out into data storage, backup and recovery, file and e-mail archiving, virtualization, infrastructure and managed IT services.



Joe Oster of Webster is CEO of Structured Technologies Inc. in downtown Rochester. The IT company ranks 21st in the Rochester Top 100 Private Companies. It is the 18-year-old company's first appearance on the list.

Structured Technologies has 40 employees. They rank 21st on the Rochester Top 100 list, as compiled by Rochester Business Alliance and KPMG.

What is the main concept behind your company?

Providing "big company" technologies and expertise to organizations of all sizes.

How has Structured Technologies changed within the last year?

New technologies are available that are truly changing the way companies buy, deploy, and support computer systems. We are in the midst of a revolution, so we're working fast to implement, train and hire to maintain our leadership position.

Can you give an example of recent changes in the industry?

There is a big push to centralize systems that were scattered in the 90s when telecommunications costs were high. Dropping costs for telecom and improved platforms to support remote users are driving big savings. It is really helping small and medium-sized businesses act big.

What new technology should companies be looking for?

There is no question that virtualization, taking one server and setting it up so it works as multiple units, is the driver behind all this great new stuff. It is providing massive improvements in cost, capability, and business continuance.

Products like VMware allow us to vastly reduce the amount of hardware needed to run a business, which also reduces the need for power and cooling and space. It's very "green," and very cost-effective. .

How does your company keep up with trends?

We belong to several national organizations so we get to see what's happening all over the United States. We do a lot of training, read a lot and are pretty good at not chasing ghosts. We are also committed to constant change. Structured Technologies is constantly changing and we look very different every couple years.

What sorts of things do companies ask of you most? What are their main concerns?

Real costs. Companies have figured out that computer systems are consumables, that they are forced to buy all new stuff every few years, and that it's a really expensive way to do business. Our success and growth is because we've completely changed that model. Think copiers. I've never bought one, and I never will. I pay a monthly fee, the thing works, gets fixed, and I get a shiny new one every few years. Four years ago we applied that model to computer systems and it makes a ton of sense. What I can't believe is it took me 15 years to figure it out. Once again, the obvious eludes me.

Being that you deal with more data than most other businesses, what are your main concerns and what structures do you have in place to address them?

We don't offer or use low-end anything, especially not data storage systems. This is serious business. You get what you pay for. We get really nervous when people try to "save money" in the care and feeding of mission-critical data. Cheap computers are one thing. Cheap storage, backup and support technologies are, well, irresponsible.

What do you think the workplace will look like in 10 years in terms of how information is exchanged and archived?

Portable. Completely. Virtual offices and people require virtual systems and virtual support. We're still tied to some "mother ship" in lots of ways. For example, even if remote, your computer still calls a particular system in a particular place to get its stuff. Next-generation computing is not a one-to-one conversation. This gets really ethereal. The ability to truly get at anything from anywhere is coming and it's very neat stuff.

Where else does your company do business and what interesting things have you been doing?

As upstate New York-based companies spread out, we follow. We work literally all over the U.S. and are getting more involved with offshore connectivity and locations. The world is still shrinking and location is no longer a design consideration. People expect that India or Australia is Webster or Henrietta, only with cooler accents. It is incredible to live in a day when the world is so systematically close.

This is your first year on the Top 100 List. What does the growth section of your business plan consist of? What can we expect from you in the future?

While I love the Top 100 badge, it's based on top-line revenues. I daresay that in any good business plan, total revenue is mostly ignored. Our constantly changing industry requires us to continually abandon old for new, which makes top line growth a real afterthought.

Our near-term focus is the rapid application of contemporary technologies and the way we support them. From my perspective, there has never been more opportunity in front of us. Staying ahead of the competition in fiscal and technical expertise will ensure another 18 years of a healthy company.

What philosophy drives you and your employees on a daily basis to help you stay focused?

A long time ago in flight school, my instructor reached over and turned the engine off while we were on final approach.

Good pilots get calm at that moment and think. Bad ones panic.

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