

Entrepreneur Profile

Christian Lawrence, CEO of SFL Data

by Krystal Peak

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What it does: Manages data for law firms and corporations through the life-cycle of litigation – from data collection, through review, to production.

HQ: San Francisco.

2010 revenue: \$13.5 million.

Employees: 125.

Year purchased: 2004.

Source of buyout capital: High-net-worth individuals, primarily privately wealthy current and former C-level execs. Among our team are the former CEO of McKesson, the former CEO of Berkshire Hathaway's re-insurance business, and the former CFO of Siebel Systems.

Age: 38.

Residence: San Mateo.

Web site: www.sfldata.com

Background: Grew up in the UK, was a management consultant, did M.B.A. at Stanford business school. Previously worked at Reuters in the United Kingdom, where he managed teams responsible for new product and marketing initiatives.

Big Picture

How's business: Growing fast. We are mapping processes across the business, identifying and prioritizing areas for improvement. We are also applying automation wherever possible. Finally we have created a dedicated innovation team to evaluate new technology and build new workflow. We are likely to have at least one to two new service offerings in 12 months time.

Biggest challenge for your business: Managing growth.

What needs to be done to help small businesses thrive: Lower medical and employee costs.



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Business moves

Reason for starting business: We (Lawrence and business partner Ciarán Power) wanted to build something great together.

Most difficult part of decision: Not taking a real job.

Biggest misconception: It's all a breeze.

Biggest business strength: Our people – just an amazing group of committed, talented individuals.

Biggest business weakness: We say yes when we should not.

Biggest risk: The business we bought was mostly paper processing. The business we built is almost all data processing/management. The paper business shrank, and while we were in the early stages of building the data business, cash flow was very tight. We were able to get enough financing to get us through.

Biggest mistake: Bad hires in key roles.

Smartest move: The growth and proliferation of data, combined with changes in e-discovery rules, created a big opportunity in the data segment. We re-focused to take advantage of this opportunity.

Biggest worry: Client retention.

What do you wish you had known from Day 1: Hire great people rather than trying to do it yourself.

Work routine

Most challenging task: Selling.

Favorite task: Hiring great talent. People are everything.

Least favorite task: Sharing bad news.

Biggest frustration: Untrustworthy players or people in the industry.

Source of support in a business crisis: Our wonderful management team, Vistage and YPO (Young Presidents Association).

Dreams

Key goal yet to achieve: A holiday house by a crystal clear lake.

First move with capital windfall: My lifeline says that won't happen.

Five-year plan: Continue to build a great company.

Inducement to sell: None right now.

Personals

Most-admired entrepreneur: Richard Branson.

Favorite pastimes: Playing soccer, drinking cold beer while barbecuing.

Favorite restaurant: In-N-Out.

What's on iPod: "A Prayer for Owen Meany" audiobook.

Automobile: Honda Civic.