

Customer Profile



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Martha A. Clarke Adamson,
CFO, Sierra Ventures

Sierra Ventures: A Case Study for IT Management in Venture Capital Firms.

Menlo Park-based Sierra Ventures selected InfoPartners as their IT services provider in 1997. Seven years later, Sierra remains a loyal and satisfied client.

In 1997, Sierra Ventures was a thriving venture capital firm, ill positioned for secure growth because the company was balancing on fragile, outdated, network technology. Sierra's IT support was provided by a single consultant. The consultant could not offer 24X7 services, advice on architecting a much-needed network upgrade or the up to the minute technical expertise required by the demanding venture capital company.

Sierra had decided to completely revamp their network infrastructure so that their information technology would enhance rather than hinder their business operations and the company would be positioned for growth. Sierra Ventures CFO, Martha A. Clarke Adamson, contacted IT services vendors and the interviews began. InfoPartners met with Ms. Adamson, discussed her business requirements, investigated Sierra's network infrastructure and presented a proposal to meet Sierra's stated objectives.

Based upon InfoPartners' comprehensive proposal, Sierra chose InfoPartners as their IT "General Contractor" for their network rebuild. This role is one that InfoPartners provides to many clients. In any network design, expansion, special project, or facilities move, there is a critical need for ven-

dor and services coordination to assure schedules are met and costs are optimally managed. Most IT services vendors do not have the expertise to act as their clients' "General Contractor"—InfoPartners does.

Ms. Adamson says, "My extremely high standards for service providers make Sierra Ventures a tough customer. When I interviewed InfoPartners, I believed that they would meet my expectations. In seven years, they have never let us down."

InfoPartners' investigation and evaluation of Sierra's information technology determined that the company had a weak and unstable network infrastructure based upon aging and inadequate equipment. In February of 1997, InfoPartners designed and installed a simple, stable, window-based network with a new file server and an in-house email server—technology upon which Sierra could expand their business.

Based on InfoPartners' efficient management of the new network installation, Sierra then decided to partner with InfoPartners for regular monthly network management and support services. Today, InfoPartners provides Sierra with four on site eight hour visits per month and remote support as needed.

Over the past 7 years, InfoPartners has managed Sierra's IT infrastructure to assist the company's successful growth. Along the way, all of the Sierra Ventures partners'

home offices have been outfitted with WiFi networks (high frequency wireless local area networks) and VPN tunnel technology to securely access the corporate network. InfoPartners has also been Sierra's "IT General Contractor" for several key corporate expansions and facilities relocations.

Ms. Adamson, looking back over the seven-year relationship with InfoPartners, was asked if she would change anything. She responded: "I would change nothing. In 1997, our network was a mess and everything associated with IT was a crisis. InfoPartners came in and immediately stabilized our network so IT never crashes. For the last seven years, I have been able to focus on Sierra's business objectives because I never have to worry about IT issues."

Sierra Ventures needed a permanent, part-time network and computer service provider, with up-to-the-minute, industry-specific technology knowledge, to efficiently manage and maintain their technology assets. Like most venture capital firms, Sierra is a demanding IT services client.

Sierra, like any other small business, had several options from which to choose when deciding how to best manage its IT infrastructure. They could have an in-house person, hire a small one or two person consulting company or they could partner with a seasoned IT services company who understood the demands of venture capital firms. Sierra had clearly determined that the small, one or two person consulting companies have a limited range of technology expertise and lack the bandwidth to provide support when and how small businesses require it—24 by 7. The resulting decision was that they needed to form a long-term partnership with a technology expert.

Sierra experienced, first-hand, the painful inconvenience of improperly managed and inadequate IT resources. InfoPartners began the outsourced IT partnership with Sierra by eliminating the constant IT calamities. InfoPartners then worked with the CFO to evaluate the state of the firm's current technology infrastructure, their IT needs relative to their stated business requirements, and recommended areas for improvement. With the corporate network stabilized and secured, ongoing maintenance could begin and additional IT projects properly implemented.

During the seven-year partnership, InfoPartners has assisted Sierra with a major remodel of their existing facilities and relocation to new, larger facilities. In both cases, InfoPartners acted Sierra's "IT General Contractor" coordinating and managing all aspects of expanding, moving, and installing the company's

technology. Unlike most outsourced IT services providers, InfoPartners offers its clients a single point-of-contact for all aspects of any special project, network expansion or facilities move. This assures that InfoPartners' clients can successfully complete their IT projects without worrying about coordinating multiple outside vendors for cabling, internet provisioning, phones, audio-visual conference system, etc.

In fact, Sierra's January 2003 move to new facilities went so smoothly that, when Sierra General Partner Jeffrey M. Drazan sent an email to all Sierra clients notifying them of the move and potential short-term communication interruption, the amazing client response was "we didn't notice!"

The heart of Sierra Ventures' IT partnership with InfoPartners is part-time, monthly, on-site computer and network services performed by InfoPartners' highly trained, technical consultants. During these visits, the technical consultants perform IT maintenance services and troubleshoot any computer and network problems. These regular visits assure the stability of Sierra's network environment.

In addition to regular monthly computer and network services, Sierra now has a fully documented network so there are no mysteries surrounding their technology investments. As part of InfoPartners regular IT services, all clients' networks are fully documented and that documentation is updated continually as the networks grow and change. The seven-year partnership between InfoPartners and Sierra Ventures continues to flourish.

"A simple 'thank you' seems entirely inadequate for the role InfoPartners plays in the overall success of Sierra's ventures. When selecting a technology partner, IT is important to investigate the longevity of their existing client relationships," said Martha A. Clarke Adamson. "Many IT services vendors can offer short term support, but few can maintain the requisite high-quality, technical expertise, and personalized care over the long term that Sierra has received from InfoPartners."

About Sierra Ventures

Sierra Ventures is a private venture capital firm focusing its investments on early and pre-public communications, software, and internet related content and infrastructure companies. Sierra works with entrepreneurs and management teams to originate and build new companies into large, profitable businesses. For more information, contact the company at Sierra Ventures, 2884 Sand Hill Rd., Menlo Park, CA 94025. Phone (650) 854-1000, Fax (650) 854-5593, or visit www.sierraventures.com.