

# Outside the Silo

When telecommunications and consulting firm ATC calls itself a boutique, it isn't in reference to the quaint shops you'd scour for collectibles. Rather, the firm's boutique character derives from its specialized expertise, with which it is guiding its customer businesses into a new world of Internet-based solutions.

Written by Brian Planalp  
Photography by Daniel Smyth

Sean Loring thought he knew all he needed to know. As president of trustaff, a staffing firm based in Cincinnati, he understood everything about his business. And business was good: In the 11 years since its founding in 2002, trustaff grew from six to 250 employees and expanded to locations as far as Florida.

Still, Loring always looked to save on his bottom line. So he began to ponder auditing his phone systems. Phones were necessary to his business, after all, and it was his responsibility to make sure trustaff was getting the best deal on them.

It wasn't. But the telecom business is tricky, and nobody who's not an expert knows it well. So Loring had to be educated in exactly how trustaff was getting a raw deal. Advanced Technology Consulting (ATC) did just that.

## Selling Solutions Inside Silos

Founded in 1999, ATC at first assisted its customers, mostly small- and medium-sized businesses (SMBs), with switched and dedicated long-distance services.

"We were selling in silos," says David Goodwin, ATC co-founder and managing partner. The model was trans-

actional selling, and ATC's role was to act as a broker of individual services between its clients and service providers. But Goodwin could see where the telecom business was going, so he took some important steps forward with his business.

ATC spearheaded the industry in adopting a hosted Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) phone system for its SMB customers in the mid-2000s. ATC also understood at an early stage the immense benefits of scaling to the cloud. Thus, when SMBs began to recognize the operational benefits of cloud computing, ATC already had solutions in place.

Today, the proliferation of bandwidth-intensive applications such as cloud computing and heavy media streaming means more data traffic for businesses, requiring more bandwidth and more reliable connectivity. Only so much data can be transmitted over broadband connections, while fiber-optic connections offer greater bandwidth, speed and performance at a lower cost, granting businesses greater access to cloud-based applications.

This trinity of developments—VoIP, cloud and fiber—is part of a convergence of IT and telecom. ATC has been





**Pictured left to right:** ATC Senior Consultant Nick Enger, truststaff President Sean Loring and ATC Co-Founder and Managing Partner David Goodwin



on the forefront of this convergence, modeling an innovative suite of services to help its customers adapt to the new landscape.

"Today we are figuring out how everything fits together," says Goodwin. "It comes down to availability. Who are the providers? What services do they offer? Because not every provider offers every service. So our job is to put together an inclusive strategy to handle all services, all locations, all contracts. We are a consulting firm in terms of the telecom space, but we are also project managers. We make sure that everything comes together."

### Mapping the Convergence

The IT/telecom convergence is an undiscovered country of scaled services and outsourced solutions. Navigating it can be difficult. Specialist boutiques such as ATC are therefore becoming indispensable to SMBs.

"Customers have different buying criteria," says Clayton Connor, senior consultant at ATC. "Some want the fastest circuits, some don't care about speed but want the best post-sale support and others say they want to buy strictly on price. Some have multiple locations or contracts in place that require restructuring. And service providers often have different pricing structures and different specializations. ATC finds out what customers' criteria are. Then, because we have been doing this for so long, we don't have to go out to all 60 of our providers. We are able to narrow down the list and then go straight to a proposal process."

"Our expertise is in mapping everything out," says Nick Enger, senior consultant at ATC. "It is our job to bring the customer the best solution. We can do that because we are solution agnostic. We have no favorites, and every solution is specific to every client."

"In the telecom field we are an inch wide and a mile deep," Goodwin says. "We are not dying to be all things to all people, but if you fall into what we do there is not a lot of competition."

The little competition ATC has comes from direct representatives of the providers it represents. But, according to Goodwin, "the providers are notoriously inaccessible. They provide a plethora of services but when it comes to helping you solve problems they over-promise and under-deliver. Most customers simply don't want to deal with them. They don't want to be talking to help desks. They call us to take care of a problem, which we take to the providers and troubleshoot. Then we get back to them once the problem is resolved."

The ATC staff has an average of 18-years' tenure in the telecom industry, so they can often fix problems more quickly than a customer could do alone. This helps cus-

tomers dedicate time and resources to facilitating productivity in their employees and growing their businesses rather than agonizing over how to navigate the new IT/telecom terrain. ATC maps that terrain and guides businesses through it, in the process reaping for them the benefits of scale.

"By bringing businesses into our fold they become part of us, and we are spending a multiple of what they spend individually," says Goodwin. "So we get greater attention and pricing consideration than a customer on their own."

**"My goal when I serve trustaff clients is to have a trusted partnership, because when you are viewed as a trusted partner you have a greater chance to be successful. That's what we have with ATC. They handle all our telecom and data so we can focus on what we do best — growing our business."**

- Sean Loring,  
President of trustaff

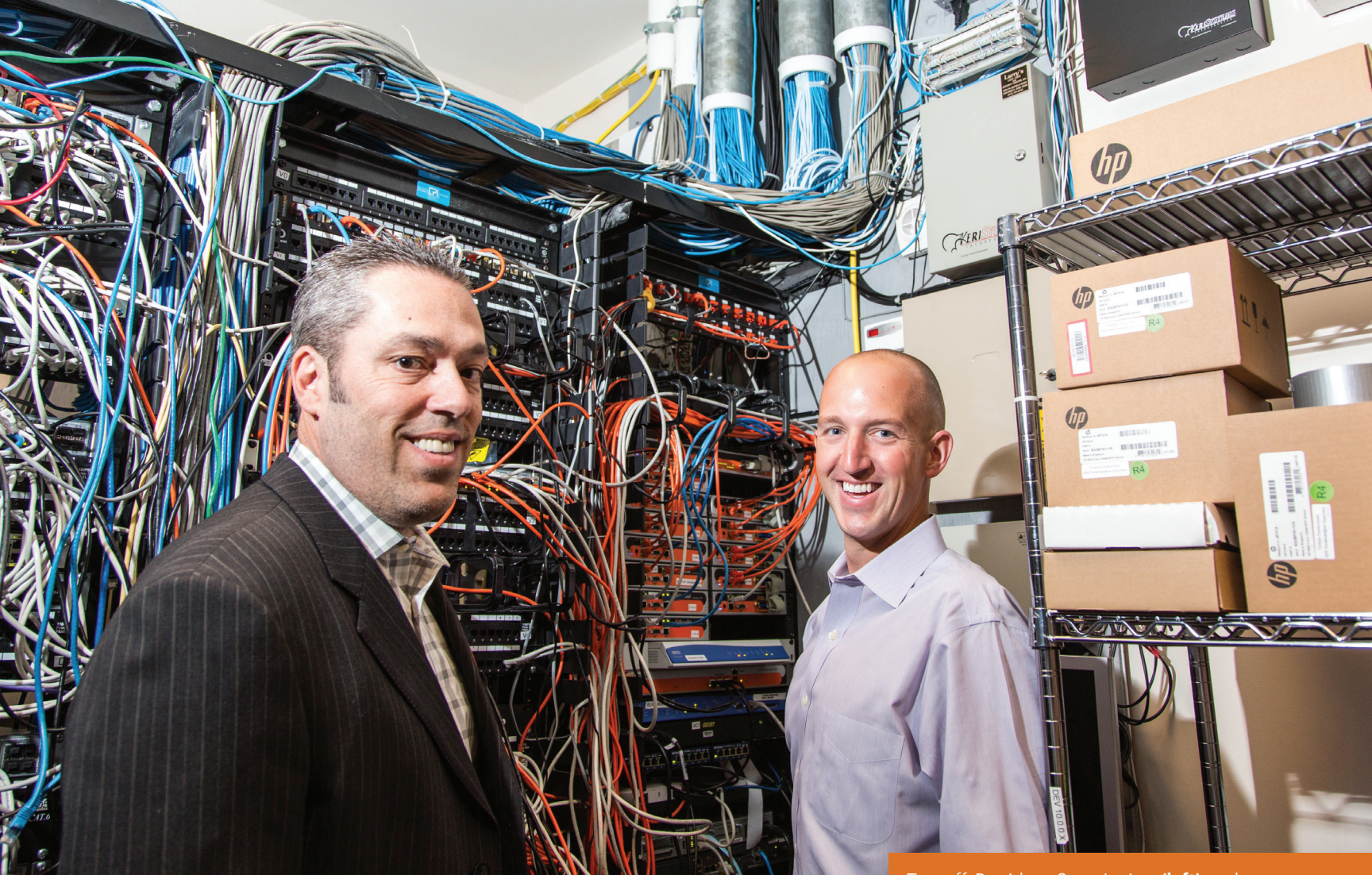
### A Consultative Selling Approach

Loring came away from ATC's presentation impressed. Not only could ATC save trustaff money, it would also become an extension of its IT department, monitor its bills, offer consultative advice on scaling the business and negotiate pricing, connections and speed should trustaff wish to expand to more locations.

"ATC educated me about the industry and carriers. It can be very confusing and they simplified it. I would never have received the level of detail they gave me from anyone else. They demonstrated a tremendous understanding of how things are connected," says Loring.

ATC performed an audit of every trustaff location, looking at all its network infrastructure and provider contracts. It saw trustaff was being billed at a 30-second initial rate with six-second increments. "If the call lasted six





Truststaff President Sean Loring (left) and ATC Senior Consultant Nick Enger (right)

seconds they were billed for 30 and then six past that," explains Enger. "We were able to negotiate a six-second initial rate with six-second increments. Additionally, now they're billed at four decimal places where initially they were only billed to the nearest penny. That produced savings just based on rounding."

"I never understood the intricacies of the audit or the increments or billing aspects where things can be very easily hidden or not talked about," says Loring. "ATC offered information that had never been offered to me. Knowledge is king to me and now I am better educated on the industry."

Truststaff signed a five-year contract with ATC, with projected six-figure savings. To date, ATC is on track to exceed that number. The contract contains features that assure truststaff is getting the best deal possible, including two-year reviews and equipment upgrade clauses.

"With technology and pricing changing so quickly, we didn't want them to be locked into something that was

good three years ago but poor now," says Enger. "That's just part of our expertise of knowing how to deal with carriers, what can and cannot get done. Truststaff is great at negotiating and they had gotten decent price points by playing the carriers against each other. The difference is when you start getting into things like contract terms, buyout clauses and billing increments, it becomes about far more than just cost per unit."

Loring sees tremendous value in ATC's consultative services. "My goal when I serve truststaff clients is to have a trusted partnership, because when you are viewed as a trusted partner you have a greater chance to be successful. That's what we have with ATC. They handle all our telecom and data so we can focus on what we do best—growing our business."

For more information, call 513.323.1122 or visit [www.4atc.com](http://www.4atc.com).