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7x24 Change INTERNATIONAL

Turns 25!

The not-for-profit organization really is the fulfilment of a vision.

7x24 Exchange International (7x24), the not for profit organization, is turning 25 years old this year. Bake a cake. Light the candles. Take pause to celebrate the fulfilment of a vision. How many ideas ever get to the crawling stage, much less walking, much less running after 25 years? Kudos to those business models, which endure for they are a rare breed indeed. The secret sauce requires an integrity of purpose separate from individual financial gain, a passion to address an enduring problem, and a few good persons of character.

AN IDEA IS BORN

Enter 1989, a full six years before Al Gore invented the internet, and Ken Brill and Dennis Cronin attend the same conference at the Boston Copley Marriott giving talks on lights out data centers. Serendipity strikes. They entered unaware of each other and left full of curiosity and intrigue about the other. Prior to that moment both felt they lived on their own island observing that IT is talking six months ahead as facilities are talking 20 years ahead and they need to align better.

This observation sparked an idea of getting a group of IT and facilities folks together in the same room to facilitate communication, develop a common vernacular, and develop a healthy respect for their respective challenges. The idea turned reality resulted in a meeting with what would become the founders of 7x24 Exchange in attendance.

- Mr. Kenneth Brill – Computer Site Engineering (facilities - deceased)
- Mr. Dennis Cronin – Shearson Lehman (facilities)
- Mr. Paul Fox – Chemical Bank (IT)
- Mr. Alan Freedman – Bankers Trust (IT - deceased)
- Mr. Frank Gialanella – SIAC (facilities)
- Mr. John Jackson – American Express Company (facilities)
- Mr. Howard Levison – Morgan Stanley (IT)

7x24's first meeting was held in November 1989 at Shearson

By Andrew Lane

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Lehman's newly completed data center facility in downtown NYC. Crossing rolodexes for valued relationships, invites went out to 30 people and 16 showed up, representing an envious, and perhaps enlightening, rate of return for today's mass marketing professionals. The general feeling following the first meeting was the respective IT and facility groups weren't too concerned with an agenda that took into consideration the betterment of the business as a whole. In their defense they also could not have conceived of such a dramatic technological leap forward.

The meeting concluded with a tour of Shearson's Greenwich Street complex, thanks to Dennis Cronin's manager at the time who sponsored the meeting and approved the tour. Perhaps not coincidentally, this Shearson facility was arguably the first data center in the country which would have qualified as Tier 4 under what would become Ken Brill's legacy of definition and certification under the Uptime Institute.

In 1990, 'Howie' Levison invited Bob Cassiliano, who ran IT for Salomon Brothers at the time, to a dinner meeting with other founders at Don Pepe's restaurant in Newark, NJ. Bob previously worked for IBM managing Wall Street relationships so he was a warm and respected introduction. Bob was voted director, then president, then chairman, a position he's held for more than 20 years. Consider how many board members and volunteers have come and passed during Bob's tenure and oversight of 7x24's enduring mission:

7x24 Exchange is the leading knowledge exchange for those who design, build, operate and maintain mission-critical enterprise information infrastructures. 7x24 Exchange's goal is to improve end-to-end reliability by promoting dialogue among these groups.

In and amongst the progressive change that's transpired in 25 years, who could have conceived the very impetus of the organization remains primary in the data center industry today: the chasm between IT and facilities? No doubt the chasm is closing but where is Moore and his Law when you need him?!

Every group needs a name and so by the third meeting this merry band of men became the "Uninterruptible Uptime Users Group" (UUUG.) The mission at the time was a "knowledge exchange to benefit the enduser community." They've always felt a need for a balance of constituents so they kept a keen eye on the number of consultants, product and service providers, IT, facilities, and other technology considerations balanced with the number of endusers. No surprise, as the group grew, for every enduser the vendor attendees increases exponentially.

Within six months, no one had a facility large enough to host. The Sheraton in Midtown New York hosted the first external meeting, which consisted of 110 attendees. Unfortunately, there was only seating for 70 and the A/C didn't work. But this was a durable crew with day jobs to worry about in

FIGURE 1. The UUUG founders.

addition to this mission. This early constituency shared a collective "baptism by fire" education about how departments were organized, how they hired and trained, and vendor reference ability. Dennis noted, "If you were an introvert, this was a difficult group to participate with." These early meetings had vigorous "pass the mike" sessions with active attendee participation.

Ambitions at the time included a couple of conferences a year and in 1991, the first newsletter was published to provide technical content, conference information, board of directors, and contacts. Meetings doubled in attendance purely by word of mouth. It didn't take long for the popularity to spread and the board soon realized the value in providing everyone access to the education, networking, information sharing, and memorable experiences, which remain the hallmark of 7x24 exchange conferences.

In 1992, the first chapter outside of New York City was formed in Minneapolis. 1994 represents the first conference held outside the New York Metro area in San Francisco. The
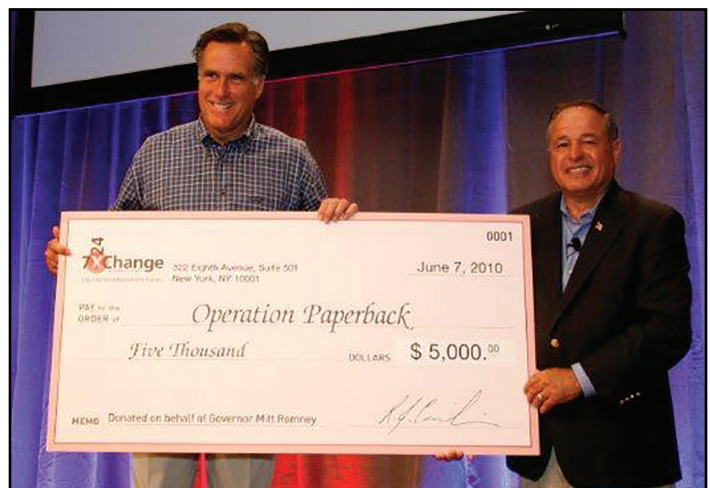

FIGURE 2. Mitt Romney and 7x24 Chairman and CEO Bob Cassiliano at the 2010 Spring conference.

FIGURE 3. Bob Cassiliano honors founder Ken Brill at the June 2013 meeting.

genesis of the "One east – one west" calendar still exists today. The board's concerns regarding attendance and cost were allayed by the success of the conference. This stretch West ultimately improved the organization but the growth to develop new chapters presented an entirely new set of business and organizational challenges.

With prospective attendees on the West Coast, the NYC volunteers found themselves up late at night, corresponding by fax and phone with the hotels for reservations, commitments, deposits, and guarantees. They found themselves with an ever increasing need to organize and incorporate chapters and address the legal, contract, financial, and liability requirements of each.

The collective brain trust in New York worked tirelessly to equip new chapters with a standard operational process to help them avoid the inevitable distraction and discouragement that comes with the extra work and administration of starting something new. There was no paycheck so they were relying on finding chapter leaders with the same passion and

FIGURE 4. Current 7x24 President Dave Schirmacher.

mission they had along with a willingness to give in a volunteer capacity. The majority of the initial chapters endured but there were also those which started and dissolved.

1997 represented the name change to 7x24 Exchange to enhance the brand of the organization into the 21st century.

MORE TALENT TO THE RESCUE

David Schirmacher's involvement started in 1998 when he was overseeing the convergence of IT and facilities with Goldman Sachs. At the time there were 200 members or so, primarily financial services companies, the majority from the NE, meeting in the basement of a hotel as he recalls. He took away a lot of applied and practical knowledge that was immediately useful to him. He was "pleased to learn that people in the room do what I do. I wasn't alone in the challenges I faced." Déjà vu. Same story eight years later. A lack of progress? Hardly. More a reinforcement to continue the charter.

Fast forward to 2010 and the 7x24 board was looking to add more executive horsepower and they actively solicited Cyrus Izzo, co-CEO at Syska Hennessey. Overseeing a national consulting firm with headquarters in New York City, Cyrus' informed and passionate leadership, work ethic, and humble nature fit the board's culture. Today there exist 23 chapters and three international chapter initiatives in the Middle East, South America, and Far East in development.

Lost in the tsunami of emails promoting the next conference is the appreciation of the hard work involved to make these experiences entertaining and seemingly effortless. It's a remarkable undertaking which really deserves gratitude for the selfless manpower and intellect behind the scenes. Introducing the current board of directors, who carry an enduring mission set by the founders of 7x24 Exchange 25 years ago:

- Bob Cassiliano is the chairman and CEO. Hard to believe that he actually has another day job once you learn what he does as the engine of 7x24 Exchange. He is also the CEO of Business Information Services (BIZ), which provides technology and consulting services to Wall Street companies.
- David Schirmacher is the president. His day job is the SVP of Operations at Digital Realty, owners and operators of the world's largest data center portfolio.
- Cyrus Izzo is the vice president. His day job is co-president of Syska Hennessy Group, a global engineering consulting firm recognized for their mission critical expertise and thought leadership.
- Juli Ierulli is director of marketing and vendor representative. Her day job directing traffic as a Six Sigma Black Belt at Caterpillar tells you who the real boss is at 7x24.
- Michael Siteman is director of chapter representation. He is former Digital Realty with current day job as executive vice president for M-Theory Group, a private cloud data center solutions provider.

Bob Cassiliano offered David Sjogren and Bill Leedecke, both past presidents, and former vice president John Oyhagaray as making significant contributions to 7x24's success. He also cited the value of early guidance provided by Ken Brill and Alan Freedman.

A FEW BASIC TENETS OF 7X24 EXCHANGE

- 7x24 endeavors to remain the largest industry association of its type with membership opportunities for organizations and professionals at all levels committed to end-to-end reliability issues. Alternative products are primarily subscription based, advertising and sponsorship driven, or an admissions driven event based organization.
- 7x24 is fanatical about and takes participant feedback very seriously. The next time you pass by that conference evaluation at the back of every presentation you attend, consider the committee responsible for compiling and responding to your feedback. Cassiliano notes, "We react to the desires of the constituents no matter the item. If it's easy to do, we do it. For example, a diabetic requested that we provide sugarless cookies. Easy. We did it. There are harder requests which we need to ponder and make good business decisions but we do that too."
- The board of 7x24 Exchange is extremely accessible, present at most meetings, and welcome face to face discussions. They encourage your participation because it makes their jobs easier. Many hands make light work. Hint, hint.
- 7x24 was developed as a forum purely for knowledge exchange which equates to no overt selling. Selling happens because it's fundamental to those who may require a business case justification or demonstrated ROI to attend. 7x24 most certainly applies these revenues toward productive and meaningful ends. Just stay classy. Enough said.
- 7x24 Exchange is a non-profit organization with a significant volunteer constituency and a unique set of business rules and challenges
- 7x24 Exchange intensified its focus on Corporate Social Responsibility in 2013. Every conference highlights a significant donation to a charitable organization. 7x24 provides funding for National Science Foundation scholarships. Salute, an incredible initiative put together by Jason Okroy and Lee Kirby, make sure U.S. military veterans with occupations and education in the mission critical industry get 7x24's complete endorsement.
- 7x24 is proud of its involvement in education from graduate school down to elementary school. They support SMU's first graduate program for data center professionals in conjunction with Chris Crosby, CEO of Compass Data Centers. The North Carolina chapter is assisting five community colleges in putting a $23M grant to good use by assisting in the development of a practical and applicable data center curriculum. In New York, Cyrus Izzo heads an initiative to

FIGURE 5. 7x24 Vice President Cyrus Izzo.

bring an ACE Mentoring Program (Architecture Construction & Engineering) education initiative to high school students. In Brooklyn, 7x24 members are involved in an elementary school and neighborhood improvement initiative designing productive afterschool programs.

The National Organization takes the lead in demonstrating action on their charter and looking for chapters, individual members, and member organizations to successfully emulate these initiatives in their respective geographies. "It goes both ways," Cassiliano notes, "We get feedback from them and hear their respective ideas and initiatives and then we share with broad constituency."

The economic reality is that 7x24 will have to make changes in order to thrive vs. just survive. This is testament to the herculean time investment and efforts by the board members, chapter leads, and countless volunteers to date. At this point, 7x24 entrusts Dolci Management with a majority of the day to day requirements under the board's direction. "More international considerations are in the works," notes Izzo, "but the velocity of this growth has healthy considerations and challenges to contemplate while retaining the organization's brand and quality."

WHAT YOU PROBABLY DIDN'T KNOW

- The board picks its locations years in advance. Few facilities meet 7x24's experience requirements their 800+ attendees have come to expect — a venue with an auditorium, classroom style seating, recreation options, food and catering, marquee event space, banquet facilities, and audio visual production requirements like a 96-ft screen.
- Consider that the fall event in Scottsdale will consume more than 800 of the 900 available rooms at the spectacular JW Marriott venue. Room guarantees without attendee commitments exceed $500K. Food and beverage guarantees alone exceed $200K. Approximate the JW Marriott's per-head charge for the

fantastic dinners, events, beverages, breakfast, lunches, and breaks attendees have come to expect and this alone exceeds the early bird offer of $1,200.

• Amid these financial commitments and pressures as a non-profit, 7x24 still manages to provide 100+ gratis passes to select participants, speakers, National Science Foundation and SMU students, and Salute's veteran constituents for example, because it's the right thing to do. There isn't a hint of reconsideration on these issues but it doesn't change the fact there remain business considerations.

• 7x24 is proud to be the only organization where the content is developed prior to sponsor involvement or selection. There is no "pay to play" proposition or requirement in any of 7x24's content or conferences. Just check the TBD's in the early agendas of other conferences, even in the panels. Objectivity reigns.

David Schirmacher's perspective on the industry's growth and immaturity is unique. While 7x24 is proud to have the highest concentration of decision making attendees in the industry, the definition of an enduser has blurred across lines. At Goldman Sachs, David was the definition of an enduser. His short stint at Fieldview solutions, a DCIM solutions vendor he worked with to create the elusive single plane of glass IT and facility environment, defined him as a vendor. His current role as the ultimate outsourced data center solutions provider makes him a blend of both vendor and enduser. "Today's landscape and definition of an enduser is less about the company one works for and more about the function they hold and the service they provide. An enduser might then be defined by someone who lives and dies based on how their data center runs." Our industry, our companies, and our functions are only in the adolescent stages of evolution.

One gets the sense in talking with the board that the candles of the 7x24 Exchange are going to burn bright for some time to come. Thank you to all board members and volunteers past, present, and future for your unwavering commitment and tireless hours. When you see these people at the fall conference at the amazing JW Marriott venue in Phoenix, reach out, shake their hand, and thank them for your experience and continuing education. Celebrate their accomplishments by your attendance. Contribute to their accomplishments through your participation. Respect their accomplishment in light of the fact they do this in addition to their day job. Happy Birthday to you 7x24 Exchange. Thank you for your enduring representation of the founder's vision and purpose. ■