



SMB Q&A

HOW REMANUFACTURE- AS-A-SERVICE IS A GREENER ALTERNATIVE FOR MSPS



Stephen McCormick 0:10

I'm Stephen McCormick, MSP Community Manager for Tubblog: The Hub for MSPs. And joining me today is Christopher Stephens, Strategic Partner Development Manager of Circle Stock Limited. A business that breathes new life into network switches and other server equipment. Hello, Chris. It's great to have you with me today. Thank you for joining us.

Christopher Stephens 0:29

Thanks, Steve. It's pleasure to be here. Always good to have a chat and unpack what we do.

Stephen McCormick 0:35

Fantastic. So before we get right into it, why don't you give us a little bit of background? And tell us about yourself? And what Circle Stock is about?

Christopher Stephens 0:46

Yeah, so yeah, I started in March of this year with Circle Stock. And the role is obviously in business development, but specifically to come in and build relationships and you know, align the strategic partners. So yeah, part of what we do here is make IT, or recycled IT, sustainable, cost effective and reliable. A term that I heard the other day from one of my connections on LinkedIn, which was really, really brilliant. And I've shared with you, it said, the second use doesn't always mean second best. And I thought that really, really fits with what we do.

Stephen McCormick 1:24

Brilliant. So a big part of what you provide, you've told me this before is, is something called Remanufacture-as-a-Service. So can you tell us a bit more about what that process entails? Where do you source the kit from, and how do you think this might be a benefit to the MSPs that might be listening?

Christopher Stephens 1:49

Yeah for sure. So a Remanufacture-as-a-Service for us entails acquiring kit from various different places. So generally, it would be from asset disposals but we've you know, acquired kit from various different locations such as charities, MSPs, end users, We've bought through platforms such as eBay and things like that. And basically what it comes down to is, we bring the kit into our headquarters here in Fareham, the kit is extensively tested using our custom designed and built testing equipment. And once that electronic testing is complete, and we're, you know, sure that the equipment is electronically sound, that's when it will move on to the physical restoration. And we've got various guys in various different departments that head up these processes. And what that would mean is, the equipment would then be stripped further into its component level, and ultrasonically cleaned, if that's needed. And then the casings would be panel beaten and folded, and then resprayed using colour matched paint, so that we can ensure that we get a consistent product at the end of what I like to call the remanufacturing engine. And in terms of answering the question of how that benefits the MSPs? Well, what we've done is, we realised that our remanufacturing engine only really operated when it was remanufacturing kit for us to resell. And the bigger picture for us is obviously sustainability. So we decided we'd open up that remanufacturing engine to our partners and end users and to general customers. Enabling them to essentially bring their kit to us, we would remanufacture it as we would to the highest standard we do for ourselves, and then we would warranty it as well. So it definitely gives us an edge in terms of making that IT sustainable, cost-effective, and we offer a warranty on it for three years generally. So that makes it reliable.

Stephen McCormick 3:50

Well, that sounds that sounds very interesting, Chris, and I think, I think you actually mentioned there about the sustainability angle, which I think we will talk about a bit later on. But just to kind of deep dive into the, into the sorts of manufacturers we're talking about here that they're quite, they're quite high spec, aren't they? The ones that that you tend to service?

Unknown Speaker 4:21

Yeah. 100%. So I'm a, you know, what we believe as a business, which is aligned with my feelings is just stick with what you know. So the big boss is very clued up with Juniper, he's worked in all sorts of industries in data centres and you know, the channel partners and his service then supported Juniper, so he's an expert in that Juniper field, and then our director of sales, who's also ex Cisco, so we stick generally with the higher end manufacturers, which is Juniper and Cisco, and some Arista, but not much. And you know, just to clarify because always when that gets mentioned, you think, Well, that's all we do. And it's not, that's not the case. I mean, we happy to remanufacture any piece of kit, it just generally comes down to whether it's cost effective to do so. The time and the effort that we go through is it's not just a case of, you know, giving it a wipe down and powering it on. So the... it's got to be viable in that sense. So yeah, we can absolutely, if a customer has a different

requirement, different brand of kit, we're always happy to have a conversation and see if we can assist them. Because at the end of the day, it's about the sustainability and the bigger picture. So we're happy to be part of that.

Stephen McCormick 5:36

That's fantastic. So yeah, we I think mentioning the sustainability part now is it's kind of it's kind of the unique selling point, isn't it? Really about about, about what you do. So let's, let's dive into that then. So you, you recondition or remanufacture a lot of this high spec kit. A lot of a lot of people talk about, about green, green washing and things like that. So they want to make sure that the sustainability part of what they do, whether that's reducing their carbon footprint or offsetting it, they want to make sure that that what they're getting is genuine in terms of the sustainability angle, so so so how do you work with the people that you work with to kind of make sure that it that it is fully sustainable? What... What practices? Do you have in in, in place that actually inch ensure that?

Christopher Stephens 6:55

Yeah, that's a, that's always an interesting question. And I think it can be approached from various different angles. I'll start by saying, the way I view what we do here at Circle Stock is, it's very much what it says on the tin, what we say that we do, we actually do. So I invite anybody, they're more than welcome to come visit us here, I'll happily give them a tour, show them exactly, you know, the facilities and the people here working, doing what we say that we do. And I think, you know, the reputation speaks for itself, we stand by our equipment. And because of the procedure that we follow, in order to get that consistent product, it makes it very easy. And, I mean, we always try to advocate, I'm a dad of three. So we always tried to advise our children, you know, the ways that we should, you know, grow up and operate. And obviously, with, you know, if you start going down that route of telling a lie, you have to keep that lie, and it gets bigger and bigger and harder and harder to keep and maintain. So at Circle Stock, we just keep it simple. You don't question things. If somebody says, "Well, look, this isn't working, effectively, send it back to us," we'll give you another one. We're not going to fight with you about it. Like obviously, we stand by our products. And that's why we confident to give a three year warranty on the case.

Stephen McCormick 8:24

Yeah, and I think you've hit the nail on the head there saying about, you know, once you get once you start telling a lie, it kind of builds up, doesn't it and gets bigger and bigger and bigger. And you can't afford to, to lose on that reputational damage if you don't deliver. So you absolutely have to get get that right. Okay, so now getting back to yourself, Chris. So I've only met you quite recently. And when I met you the.. one of the first things that that you said to me was that you love to network and meet and meet people to kind of understand more about them and what makes them tick. I love that. That attitude. I'm all about peer groups and getting people to sit around a big table and just talk about what they're passionate about. And I think that that's awesome. So what is What's your philosophy on net working out? How do you see it?

Christopher Stephens 9:35

Yeah, I'll try and keep this as short as possible. The, the networking, I believe is a vital part of of, you know, any type of business. The biggest thing here is by building relationships, so I consider myself a proactive relationship builder because if I can sit and I can chat with someone, we will find common ground somewhere. And what I've realised in my almost 40 years on the, on the good planet, is that we are actually more alike than we are different. And the more that we spend time talking about things, the more we'll find things in common. And the moment we start hitting those touch points, then everything starts, you know, there's that element of trust that starts growing. And for me, it's like this, if you ask me, we'll do business. And vice versa. There's a well known author is was actually a customer of mine, in the past. And he very much speaks the same philosophy as Simon Sinek does about people buy from people. And that's exactly what it is. That's what networking is all about. It's about building those relationships, finding the common ground, and you know, you go from there. And for me, sometimes you're going to meet people, and they won't be business that happens. But it's not all about the business, it's about the relationships. So if we keep that in mind, you're going to have people and this is my philosophy is I want an army of like minded individuals that are speaking up for me in rooms that I'm not present in. And I do the same. So when I get to know my connections, which is something as you know, I keep in contact with you quite regularly. And it's not just you, I do that with everyone. You know, it's because that's where the relationships come from. And when we get that nailed, then the business flows and the referrals, flow. And we're helping each other and we're adding value, and that's the big thing, the networking, building the trust, where we can add value. Pretty much it for me.

Stephen McCormick 11:46

Yeah, I mean, yeah, I think that pretty much sums up the whole the whole ethos about why you should keep these relationships going between your... between people that, you know, are in a similar position to what you do, because you kind of like, business is all about relationships. And if you can, if you can build them, maintain them, you know, people will get to know like, and trust you, as my mentor often says, Richard Tubb. So it's kind of like you really need to kind of to keep it going and keep that momentum flowing. Because you never know when they're going to be talking about you in a in a positive light. When you're not there, which I which I think what you just mentioned there was fantastic about about not about what they say about you when you're not in the room that that is that is absolute gold, I am keeping that one, Chris. That's, that is awesome. So I, I spoke to you the other day about the customer experience, which is something I quite like hearing people's take on because I think everyone's... everyone's view on on this is similar, but it can be vastly different to so why is the customer journey so important to what you do at Circle Stock? And what you do generally in life? So...

Christopher Stephens 13:31

Yeah, also another gold question. And that really, you know, it gets people thinking, and, you know, for me, a customer journey is only as good as how streamlined and smooth the internal process is, in your business. It's that simple. If you have everything in place, and in order, the customer journey flows nicely. And then if you've got a good customer journey, you've got good rapport with your customers, and they will continue to do business with you because it's a very painless process. So the quicker we can process orders, the quicker we can get equipment through our remanufacturing process is beneficial to our customers. And at the end of the day. I'll I'll use the the kind of term as

we do in the marriage where we say, a happy spouse is a happy house. Oh, yes, it's pretty much the same with business. If you've got a happy customer, then things are going well. You know, that's what we aim for. And, you know, things will go wrong, as they always do. It's inevitable that these things will happen. But it's also the approach that you take to make them right. You know, at the end of the day, the blame game doesn't help anybody. Let's just get the problem fixed. And that's what we do. Yes, that attitude of if there's an issue we We'll work with you to sort it out. And if it's a problem with the device, you're not going to, you're not going to beat around the bush for that.

Stephen McCormick 15:07

Yeah, I think it's true that it's actually it's kind of, it's easier to to, to lose existing customers through bad service than it is to attract new ones, especially in the channel that we both are part of because, you know, as I say, about the reputation, a lot of people talk, it's not just our peers, it's our customers too. And they, you know, it doesn't take much to kind of to get that bad. Rep. And I think that things like the the customer experience, company, culture, those things are really important now, because we're such a connected world, and to kind of have habits so that we're actually looking after our, our customer base, and, you know, and our partners, that is the, that is the kind of standard that we should all be kind of aiming for. It's the it's the kind of it's the table stakes of the 21st century, shall we say? So yeah, that's brilliant. Well, I've really enjoyed really enjoyed speaking to you, Chris, I've really, really loved the way that you kind of bring this kind of feeling of, I always get something from our chats. And I think that I think that this is absolutely no exception. I've just got one final question. For you now, is there a book that you could recommend to our audience that's had a big impression on you and your outlook on life?

Christopher Stephens 17:01

Yes, absolutely. And something that you mentioned earlier, which I think is vitally important is you mentioned Richard Tubb being your mentor. And this is exactly in that same way. I have mentors myself. And I mentor as well. And I'm sure you do the same. Yeah. Because and I go through life with that. This idea of I mentor, because I've been mentored. And it's all about paying that forward. Like my mentors have paid it forward. For me, I pay it forward for others. And one of my mentors recommended the book, perhaps you know it, if not, I would suggest definitely going and purchasing. And I was advised to get a highlighter, and go through this book. It's called The Breakthrough Code. And honestly, it will teach you things about yourself. And you will start connecting with the people and the story. It's really, really good, easy reading, nothing too complex, but some really, really gold information in there. So yeah, get a highlighter, get the book and highlight the parts that stick out to you easy way to reference it when you you know, want to go back to it or whatever. And yeah, The Breakthrough Code.

Stephen McCormick 18:16

The Breakthrough Code, I am going to look that up. As soon as we've finished this, this call Chris. I will also put any any links that we have mentioned in this conversation in the in the show notes that will be accompanying this video, so that that will be at the bottom of the description. Well, Chris, again, it's been an absolute pleasure. I if people want to connect with you, how can they get in touch

with you? Are you on LinkedIn? Can they get in touch with the via the website? What's the best way to kind of do that?

Christopher Stephens 18:59

Yeah. And likewise, Steve has been an absolute pleasure. I really thank you for having having me on the show and taking the time to hear what we're about. But yeah, in to answer your question about linking with me, I think, you know, the big thing now is LinkedIn. So I'm on LinkedIn. I'm available, you can send me an email, you can send me a WhatsApp, give me a phone call, send me a smoke signal, you know, a note on a dove. If that's what you're into, you know, anything. I'm happy to connect with anybody. And like I said, it's all about relationship building. Even if we on you know, in different industries. We connection is always good to me.

Stephen McCormick 19:40

I want to thank you again, Chris. It's been an absolute pleasure.

Christopher Stephens 19:45

Likewise, Thanks, Steve. I really appreciate it.

Stephen McCormick 19:48

Well, that's Christopher Stephens of Circle Stock Limited and I've been Stephen McCormick for Tubblog: The Hub for MSPs. Please like and subscribe if you like this video, and we'll see you next time.