

## Nursing the growth of TM Solutions

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Suzanne Chappell, managing director and founder of TM Solutions, has come a long way from her original career as a nurse. From this dedicated and caring profession, she transferred her skills to the world of telecommunications and commerce. Her attentiveness to her employees and her reseller customers' satisfaction has put her at the top of a successful managed billing and virtual reseller company, with a turnover that has continued to boom.

The last financial year for the business ending July saw TM Solutions' sales orders rise by 300 per cent on the previous year. The company also tripled its office space in March as its team doubled in number over 12 months. Following a strong seven years in existence, TM Solutions is thriving because of Chappell's obsession with her business. She buzzes on the challenge of today's technological environment: "I don't just like one challenge, I like lots of challenges. That's what I enjoy about convergence; it's pulling it all together."

Passion for the job is key to being a success in the telecoms industry, advocates Chappell. "I never do anything I don't want to do. If anyone gets up these days and thinks they can't face what they have to do that day, life is too short, do what you want to do instead," Chappell states.

"To be successful in anything is a lot of hard work. It takes time and attitude. You have to deliver what you say you will. Once you've proven you're capable, you will move up within your company or develop the expertise you need to start up your own. This is a lifestyle; it takes over your life when you're successful. I get a buzz out of it, that's why I do it," she adds.

Fundamentally, Chappell cares about her staff and her customers. "I will not tell anyone any lies and I will stand up and support someone if I think they're right," she states. "It's that commitment that works. If you've got that attitude, you can go to the top. You just need a boss that recognises your skills."

After marrying a southerner, Chappell vacated the north and her nursing profession, and headed down country. She began working for a multi millionaire as his right hand woman, overseeing his five companies and reporting back with no holds barred. "He wanted someone he could trust to keep an eye on things when he was out of the country," straight talking Chappell explained, "He needed

someone who wouldn't gloss over the facts because they were scared of him."

One of the multi millionaire's companies was a LCR reseller. When the general manager of that business suddenly left, Chappell found herself launched into her career in telecoms. She says: "I was told to find someone to replace him. The problem was it was difficult to find someone as the industry was so new back then, over 10 years ago. So I was told to step into the general manager's shoes."

Without, in her words, "knowing one end of a phone from the other", Chappell stepped into the breach. "I ran that company for two years and enjoyed it thoroughly. I dealt with every aspect of the early days of a telecoms company, which was very basic compared to what they are today."

As a woman in the business, Chappell says that in the early days she was something of a novelty. "All the people I dealt with were men. I was a rarity, but I was soon acknowledged and accepted. I used to be called the secretary by people that didn't know me, wherever I went. They would ask me, 'where's the boss?'. I'd tell them I was the boss. It was alright really, but it happened every time I turned up at events. It took men a little while to realise I was the company's decision maker, and I could make them on the spot."

When the multi millionaire owner of her reseller business decided to semi retire, he sold off some of his portfolio of companies, including the telecoms business. Chappell went with the sale for a three month transitional period.

She was then offered a dealership by the new owners, which she did for two months full time, then kept on for another four months as a safety net while she started her own business. "I thought, 'I can do this myself', so I set myself up," Chappell explains. "I struck a couple of bargains selling minutes, set up the billing system, and started up in my back bedroom, along with one person I inherited from the original company who'd designed the billing system."

Now, Chappell heads up TM Solutions. The company white labels managed billing services for the industry - a service that is signing over 150 new clients each month - sells products via its TMS CLick online product and billing interface to virtual resellers - including LCR, non geographic numbers, daily CDRs and CDR checks and line rental, plus face to face product training for sales staff - and helps companies set up reseller divisions. In the latter role, Chappell goes into an existing business as temporary head of the new division, then designs and

implements a reseller business, including staffing it and setting up billing systems. Around 14 days later, the new revenue stream is ready to roll.

The future at TM Solutions depends on Chappell and her imagination, she says. "There's nothing we can't do with our billing. I'm always coming up with whacky ideas and getting our people to make it bill. It's thinking out of the box that makes this company work, it's about what I do differently from everyone else, about how I look at things differently."

Her dedication to the job is the same reason why there is a shortage of women at the top of the reseller game, Chappell says: "Women can juggle things a lot more than men and multi task, but the limitations that having children place on women isn't what this job entails. It's not nine to five. I live this job. It's time demanding. Women are accepted in and are very capable of succeeding in this industry, but they need flexibility and support from their bosses to work that with family life. Even though a mother is dedicated to work and giving it 100 per cent, poor management will hold her back and affect her career."

On why she has done well, Chappell comments: "I can't sit still. I work every hour I can, but I also play hard. I could never give up work; this is the job that will keep me in the lifestyle I need. I love what I do. I deal with some absolutely wonderful people. I deal with my bureaus individually, and I never get any moving away. That's where women are better than men; women excel at building relationships."

To that end, Chappell has two key women in her sights to be those to take over her reigns as and when she decides it is time to kick back from the business a little. Her 17 employee strong business is predominantly female. Only five staff are men, Chappell says. On why, she comments: "Most of the roles here are customer care, looking after our bureaus and our virtual resellers, rather than sales. Women are more used to having to care and that's what people like; women just have the knack of making people feel like that. It's a skill that men often lack."

When she is not at the office, Chappell sets sail in her 36 foot yacht. She skippers around the coast and switches off her business brain for a few hours of precious freedom. "My yacht is like a little haven for me. I don't talk to anyone. It gives me a completely different outlook on life. I get completely away from telecoms," she says, although it doesn't look like Chappell will be leaving this market any time soon.

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