

Patti and Scott Scharf are Catching Clouds

AN ACUITY COMPANY

Scott and Patti Scharf wanted to get back in business.

They have an entrepreneurial spirit, and wanted to use their accounting and technology expertise to help people.

"We'd always looked for something we could do together. I was looking forward to getting back to being an entrepreneur and having my own business. We wanted to build a business that we'd want to work at, and that everyone would want to work with," Scott remembers.

Scott has worked in IT for almost 30 years, and Patti is a long time CPA. They enjoy the benefits of their vast knowledge, but didn't take it for granted.

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"This whole thing really came down to Patti. She wondered what businesses without an IT guy and accountant do? How do they perform the tasks essential to running a business? We built our business to solve this question."

So, they decided to start their own accounting practice. Scott would take care of the technology, while Patti worked as the accounting guru. But, they were entering a vast market. The big four accounting firms dominated the space.

Patti and Scott needed a niche. So, they went online.

Heads in the Cloud

In 2010, Patti attended an accounting conference that showcased some of the newest cloud-based software on the scene. It offered capabilities that she and Scott had never seen before, and that got the wheels turning.

"Patti came home all excited, saying 'oh my God, the cloud is here, this is awesome!' Only a few other accountants even mentioned ecommerce, with none of them focusing on ecommerce as a single niche. So Patti had the idea to take advantage of an emerging space. She said 'hey, if I do this, will you work on it with me?' And that was how it started."

With that they took their business online. Patti and Scott would create a cloud accounting practice, soon specializing in ecommerce businesses. They called it Catching Clouds.

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But, they were entering uncharted territory. No other people that they knew of were doing ecommerce accounting, especially as a niche. But, that didn't scare Scott away.

"It was perfect timing really. We'd been saving for a while, Patti had just sold her tax practice, and I got a nice package resulting from a layoff notice at my last job. At that point, we were all in. Patti's parents were our first employees, and from there we've just continued to grow."

So, they went for it. Patti and Scott were flexing their entrepreneurial muscles, and had first pick in a space that barely anyone knew about.

"This was back in 2011. Our first customer was an Amazon buyer, and from there we knew that ecommerce was where we wanted to be. Our core service is as the accounting department for ecommerce businesses. We've dabbled in other areas, but it always comes back to our niche."

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In the past seven years, Catching Clouds has honed its skills, cornered the market, and given the ecommerce space the accounting services it has needed for so long.

Even experts can make mistakes. Blazing a trail doesn't come without some much-needed dousing. But, for Scott and Patti, it's all about learning.

For Scott, knowing the issues and plights that small businesses encounter makes Catching Clouds better. After all, they're a small business too.

Evolving Expertise

After nearly ten years working in ecommerce and cloud accounting, hiring employees and building a client base, Catching Clouds is definitely the leader in its space.

"We've set the bar. We really are the leaders in ecommerce accounting. We're experts in it, and we have to be. You have to be able to talk and communicate with your customers and understand the specifics of their numbers, technologies, and challenges. Ultimately, you have to care."

Patti and Scott attend conferences to keep themselves up to date, and to relay what they've learned to their clients and partners to keep their business on top.

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But, there are always challenges to overcome and mistakes to be made.

"Like any business, we've run into some issues. One of our biggest mistakes was picking up non ecommerce clients. They were expensive, and distracted us from perfecting our niche. But, we like to think of mistakes as learning experiences."

Being small business owners themselves, Patti and Scott related to the challenges their clients experienced. While Patti and Catching Clouds' expert ecommerce accountants deal with the numbers, Scott spends a lot of his time advising clients on running their business.

"With cloud services, it's less about your billable hours and more about advisory services. We want to offer advice as just another business owner. We don't just talk about our core services. We deal with all the same things from payroll to insurance. It really helps to know what they're going through."

It's about helping businesses like theirs thrive. To do that, the couple have to constantly search for better ways to provide better services.

But giving advice wasn't new to Scott either. He's been a consultant for a long time, and has always kept the betterment of his clients' businesses in mind.

"It's all about tying everything back to the goal of the business. How does this support it, help it grow, and evolve? That's always been our approach. We love long-term relationships, and love to see how we affect growth."

Scott and Patti want to create trust. It's not just about Catching Clouds' bottom line. It's about helping businesses like theirs thrive. To do that, the couple have to constantly search for better ways to provide better services.

For international payments, Veem was just what they needed.

"Everybody Wins"

"The biggest challenge for our clients is efficiency. They have to be as efficient as possible because they're either selling on and competing with Amazon, or trying to keep up with them. But with that speed, they have to ensure they have accurate numbers."

For Catching Clouds' small business clients, conducting business and evolving as fast as possible is crucial. But, keeping accurate records of transactions and other numbers is hard to do at such high speeds.

They use Veem to pay their vendors safely and efficiently, and then we can get that information

"So, I spend a lot of my time doing ecommerce business process optimization. I help them find the best cloud inventory tools, the right insurance, and the best international wire tools. Markets change every month, quarter, and year in ecommerce, and we have to make sure our clients can keep up."

With the shadow of Amazon looming over their clients, Scott and Patti had to find the safest, fastest, and most reliable tools.

"Veem's visibility is crucial for us. We can keep their accounts payable, books, and transactions up to date without even speaking with the client. They use Veem to pay their vendors safely and efficiently, and then we can get that information."

Transparency for Catching Clouds means efficiency and optimization for their client. But, it's not all about time.

"We actually had a client save \$5,000 in wire fees last year by using Veem. They know if their vendors have been paid, and then we know how to affect the accounting. In our high speed and international world, it really makes a huge difference."

Everybody wins. That's the mentality at the heart of Catching Clouds. Scott and Patti didn't start their business for themselves, but to help other businesses succeed and grow as much as they have.

"We've always wanted to support the entire market. So, we've launched 'Catching Clouds Academy' which provides accounting training courses for ecommerce businesses and for the accountants who love them. We want to help other business owners and accountants do what we do as well as we do it."

Scott and Patti are connecting the ecommerce world one account at a time. They're family business creating a community in the cloud.

What's not to love?

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