



Proactive Networks' Partnership with ITS and How It Changed Their Business

12-Minute Read

Growth and New Opportunities: The Beginnings of Proactive Networks

Michael Curry, an ITS Partner in Los Angeles, founded Proactive Networks in 1997. Proactive Networks was a Value-Added Reseller (VAR) before becoming a Managed-IT Service Provider (MSP), grew from the backbones of Curry's love for computers and his father's encouragement.

"Back in college, I got a super old computer. I mean, it was new at that time, and I started tinkering with it, thinking it was interesting," Michael shared.

“I was able to make things easier for myself, like using a computer in my dorm versus going to the computer lab like everyone anyone else. I learned how to copy and hack basic programs and install them on my computer. That got me deeper and deeper.”

After college, Curry found himself working for his dad’s insurance business; here, he mainly was fixing computers.

“I liked that more,” Curry said. “So, my dad kept pushing me to be an entrepreneur and start my own business. He kept saying, “You know the benefits are incredible! You have to try and start your own business while you can.”

“So, I just started. I left the company and was able to pick up some unhappy clients, and I just went on starting my own business that way.”



The Good and the Bad of Going Solo

When Curry founded Proactive Networks, there were definite perks to being the head of the ship. He enjoyed the ability to make all the decisions; he didn’t have to go to anyone to ask for approval. If there were new accounts, he didn’t necessarily have to bring on new personnel.

“All of it just kind of went to the bottom line, and it was, you know, bigger for me.” Curry clarified.

But at the same time, having complete control over the company’s decisions was a “double-edged sword.” “Making all the decisions is tough,” Curry said, “because everything points back to you if you make a wrong decision. Everyone needs to go to you for approval.”

It was only him and about 6 or 7 people, with one or two as admin and everyone else as tech, so it was “pretty stressful.” The staff numbers were also a problem, as was keeping personnel. He mentioned, “It’s tough finding good people at a reasonable rate out in LA. It was hard finding them, but it was also tricky keeping them because I wasn’t running that good of a ship.”

Curry also admitted he “wasn’t big on systems and processes.”

“It was a little chaotic. The whole ship was constantly springing leaks, and we were constantly sticking our fingers in all these different holes. Some holes were huge, and we’d lose clients, then we’d get a few because I was pretty good at sales.”



“
**The up and down was stressful.
I didn’t have crazy 10–15-hour
days or anything, but I
definitely had to field phone
calls, and I sometimes cringed
when checking my email.**
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Aside from the challenges of keeping up with clients and personnel, his personal life took a hit. “My mind wasn’t able to focus on family as much. And at that time when I merged with Tom [ITS’ CEO], I had two kids, and they were both under the age of 5 or something. I wasn’t able to focus.”



Finding Relief: Partnering with ITS

Curry was reading “Traction” and “Rocket Fuel” by Gino Whitman when Tom Andrulis, CEO of Intelligent Technical Solutions (ITS), brought up the idea of a partnership. ITS was a Managed-IT Service Provider like Michael’s company, Proactive Networks.

It came at the right time; Curry was reflecting on his role in his company. He had encountered the idea of a business needing a visionary and an integrator to succeed – he had identified himself as a visionary. His ship was in a state of chaos, and Curry knew he wasn’t the best at implementing processes that turned his vision into reality. So he decided to take the plunge into partnering.

When asked what else pushed him to find a business partner, Curry said, “It was the combination of the book “Rocket Fuel” by Gino Whitman and seeing other people who had a partnership. Most of them work well; it was the Yin and the Yang effect.”

“Tom ended up being the Yin to our Yang,” Curry smiled.



The Transition Process

But before the final decision to partner with ITS, Curry needed to make sure he was making the right decision. He didn't want to partner with just anyone. He had to put his concerns about his clients, employees, and position in the company to rest; this was a long, careful process.

The biggest concern you're going to have, according to Curry, was trust.

"You need to trust what they're saying, what they say they can do, and trust what things are like going forward," he said. "Trust was a big thing for me. And I couldn't pick up anything that made me not trust Tom."

Although Curry, despite trusting Tom, still had to adjust to having someone else at the helm.



"Tom is so steady and unemotional that at times that would frustrate me because I wanted to see him show some emotion or concern," Curry mentioned. "He's kind of like 'Hey man, it's okay, we're going to be alright don't worry about it, we'll figure this out.' and I'm like, 'But the sky's falling!'"

"Though he's been pretty good at pivoting in certain areas and making smart decisions. He's hired some very smart people. There are some very unique people who can be both integrators and visionaries. I think he's one of those that can do both."

Curry then shared his concerns about clients. “Having clients leave was a big concern. What would my clients think if they get a notice of the change and if their experience was different?” No matter the change in company structure, Curry needed to know that his clients wouldn’t suffer for it.

“You just want to be careful about communicating with each client that you’re changing and merging with another company,” Curry said. He reassured his clients not to be afraid of certain things and kept the same technical team to keep familiarity between the clients and the company.

It became a group effort between Michael and Tom to list out concerns and go through them. They discussed company values and compared Curry’s hopes for Proactive Networks to what Tom wanted to do.

Curry said, “Tom asked what my next 5, 10, 15 years would look like. We made sure we weren’t on different tracks; what if Tom wanted to merge with me and, all of a sudden, push me out? Then we dug into the financials and had some lawyers go back and forth for a while; then we found a way to make it work.”

He also credited Matt Phillips, current Sales Director of ITS, for his presence during the transition. Curry pointed out that Matt would calm him down; Matt was very good at keeping relationships. It was a relief for Curry to have someone who could understand his alarm a little more.

“Matt being there was really key,” Curry said.



Before and After: What Changed After Partnering with ITS?

Curry had to adjust to life as an ITS partner after the transition period and the hammering out of legal details. There were ups and downs – as we all know, change is never easy.

Curry said that after the transition period, there was a lot of scheduling. What would typically take a week to get a new computer ordered and ready to go could take three weeks. “There were some things back then,” Curry mused, “that Tom was struggling with that he doesn’t struggle with anymore.”

For example, project management was something that improved throughout the years. The entire service process is more efficient than it was before, allowing ITS to help more clients.

Curry had also to accept that processes within the organization were less familiar than he was used to; it was the pay-off for having a more organized system with more people behind him.

He focused on soothing client concerns about the merger by keeping close contact with them. Curry was now able to focus on what he did best – client relationships.



He said, “I’m doing a lot more with the Client Account Management and Sales side of things. And I feel like I do that better because I can help continue that relationship side which is so critical.”



Curry claimed he no longer had to do ten different types of jobs or wear ten different hats and do all ten on average. He could do one or two things with higher quality and focus on something he was better at.

The hours have gone down for him too, and there was a massive difference in the amount of stress. “The amount of stress went from 80-20 to 20-80, you know. So, a huge flip,” Curry said. “I was more interested in having more of a lifestyle where I could balance work and the family. And so that was one of the benefits that came about the partnership.”

His staff also adjusted well to the change. Curry saw his team become more confident and solid because they’ve got more people behind them.

“The team wanted and liked being appreciated and being respected and being given more opportunities to make more money through training,” Curry shared. “I think that that’s really shifted the overall atmosphere and the environment and then, obviously, the interaction with the clients. I think my team adjusted really well.”



Advice for Future Partners of ITS

When asked about advice for businesses considering a partnership with ITS, this is what Curry had to say:

“First read that book “Rocket Fuel” by Gino Whitman. Find out if you are in either of those Visionary or Integrator roles and how are you balancing or managing the other side of it? If you got that figured out and things are going pretty well, you may not need a partnership.”



He also advises people to ask how much you value your time with your family. If you'd rather be in the office, then maybe you should keep doing things the way you are. But having a partnership can help balance out your days, so it's not all work.

But if things aren't going great for your business and you're struggling to find time for all your priorities, he said that having a partnership helps. It feels like someone going in front of you and saying, "Well, what if you could take that big, huge frustration, that inconsistency and revenue, and employees, then creates something a lot more stable and have this huge backload of people to utilize?"



It could allow you to find the Yin to your Yang and help keep your ship afloat.

Ready to get the most out of your business? Let's have a chat on ways you can partner with us.