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MAVENS OF THE BELTWAY

Carahsoft facilitates relationships between business and government

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High-level matchmaking inside the Beltway can be a tricky business. But Reston, Va.-based Carahsoft has cracked the code when it comes to meeting the needs of both technology manufacturers and government end users.

Carahsoft in 2014 celebrated its tenth year and is recognized by Washington Business Journal as one of the fastest growing companies in the D.C. area. The privately held company is organized around business units that provide IT solutions for federal, state, and local government agencies. At any given time, Carahsoft is working with 200 to 300 different technology companies, ranging in size from a two-person start-up to publicly traded Adobe, to pair their products and expertise with potential government clients.

“Our model has always been to take care of emerging new technology companies by helping them get their products to market,” said Michael Shrader, Carahsoft’s vice president of Intelligence and Innovative Solutions. “We’re always willing to talk to a technology company, but we have to make sure it’s the right fit for both sides. We want to make sure they solve a business proposition for our government customers.”

Carahsoft ended 2014 with more than \$2.2 billion in revenue, up from \$1.7 billion at the end of 2013, and its staff of nearly 500 has roughly doubled since 2011. It is partner to a number of leading software manufacturers, including Red Hat, SAP, and Symantec. The company also hosts annual events including the Government Big Data Forum and the HP Software Government Summit, which help government participants discover innovative ways to solve difficult problems.

When it comes to matching a tech company to an end user, Shrader explained that while small technology manufacturers have cutting-edge solutions to offer the Intelligence Community, Department of Defense, and civilian agencies, those companies typically have little government visibility or experience. So Carahsoft provides expertise around the government contracting process, promotes the vendors’ technologies through webinars and on-site forums, and manages security clearances. As Shrader said, Carahsoft “takes the pain out of the process.”



IMAGE CREDIT: CARAHSOFT

In the last decade, Carahsoft has seen many changes, including substantial growth in the number of emerging technologies on the market. Furthermore, terror and cyber threats increased while budgets shrank, forcing the company to offer more innovative services.

“We’re able to help make the connection between what government needs to do with less money and what the manufacturers want to do on the tech side,” said Carahsoft’s Mary Warmkessel, senior director, Intelligence Community Focal Point.

Joint purchasing of technology within and across agencies, for example, increases efficiency for both the government and manufacturers. Furthermore, technologies such as VMware, Arista, PernixData, and Splunk contribute toward consolidating data centers and streamlining IT operations, Shrader said, allowing government customers with constrained budgets and broadening missions to accomplish more with less.

Among the biggest growth areas are secure cloud computing and nearly anything related to mobility, cybersecurity, Big Data, and the Internet of Things. According to Shrader, some of today’s most imaginative technologies include Gridless Power’s ruggedized mobile power stations; Looxcie, a wearable, wireless streaming camera that could be useful for first responders; ikeGPS, which performs GIS data collection and measurement on mobile devices; iMapData, a geospatial platform that visualizes data; TouchShare, which provides real-time geospatial collaboration tools; and Terra Pixel, the leading developer of OGC standards-compliant geospatial data services used by the Department of Homeland Security.

One way Carahsoft keeps up with customer needs is to exhibit annually at USGIF’s GEOINT Symposium. In the past, the “Carahsoft Pavilion” has housed a couple dozen technology vendors as well as space for demonstrations. Carahsoft will do the same this June at GEOINT 2015—which is likely to draw even more customers since the event will be held in Washington, D.C., for the first time.

Carahsoft forecasts significant growth throughout 2015. The company plans to hire about 100 new employees including many recent college graduates and will move into new Reston offices, nearly doubling its space.

As customer needs grow, Carahsoft works to stay one step ahead of the government wish list. By knowing short-, medium- and long-term requirements, Shrader said, the company is able to seek out solutions. The adoption of cloud technology, for one, is behind the curve.

“There are plenty of initiatives in this area,” he said, “but moving to the cloud while maintaining the government security standards has been the challenge.”

And thus, the search continues for the perfect match.