The Power of Innovation

An Interview with Kevin Samuelson, Chief Executive Officer, Infor

EDITORS' NOTE *Kevin Samuelson was appointed as the Chief Executive Officer of Infor in 2019 after having served as the firm's Chief Financial Officer. He has more than 20 years of experience in technology, finance, operations and M&A. Samuelson joined Infor at its inception in 2002 and helped grow the company from $30 million to nearly $3 billion in annual revenues over 10 years. He left Infor in 2013 and spent three years working at two prominent SaaS software companies before rejoining Infor in 2016. Prior to joining Infor in 2002, Samuelson worked in Equity Research for Robertson Stephens and Bank of America. He has a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of California at Berkeley.*

Kevin Samuelson

COMPANY BRIEF *Infor (infor.com) is a global leader in business cloud software products for companies in industry specific markets. Infor builds complete industry suites in the cloud and efficiently deploys technology that puts the user experience first, leverages data science, and integrates easily into existing systems. Over 68,000 organizations in 170 countries worldwide rely on Infor's more than 17,000 employees to help overcome market disruptions and achieve business-wide digital transformation.*

Will you highlight the history and heritage of Infor and how the company has evolved?

Infor is a global leader in business cloud software products for companies in industry specific markets. Our mission is to improve business outcomes for our customers and change the way work gets done. Infor was formed in 2002 with business aggregation as its first phase. We acquired key applications and businesses to establish vertical expertise in a number of key industries.

The second phase began in 2010 with our visionary CEO Charles Phillips leading Infor's industry cloud transformation to innovate, unify and modernize our technology, and build a robust cloud strategy centered on our unique approach of industry-specific CloudSuites.

The phase we're entering now is about execution and acceleration. We are doubling down on being an innovative, trusted partner to our customers, propelling their success with new data-driven insights, operating efficiencies, and a beautiful user experience.

We have grown quickly to take a leading position in delivering business software to a global customer base and we are just getting started.

Will you discuss Infor's culture of innovation and your focus on product development?

At Infor we strongly believe in the power of innovation. As solution providers we must continually push the established boundaries and venture further into new concepts, forging new opportunities for customers.

We don't chase ideas lacking substance. We hold ourselves to strict standards about usability, practical deployment, and market readiness. We don't want to build software that the user community doesn't need – today or tomorrow. We don't want to focus time on ideas that have limited business value, whether that means improved market insights through analytics, improved productivity, or better service.

Our customers must be able to turn our innovation into their innovation. They must be able to embrace it and make it their own, empowering their stakeholders, from frontline users to the strategic C-Suite. This is why we look at innovation through a customer's eyes.

Our industry focus helps to fuel practical innovation. As we work closely with industry leaders on features and functionality, we are entrenched in the day-to-day issues customers face. This allows us to apply creative thinking and problem solving to real situations, using our industry councils as sounding boards. These councils, made up of customers with an eye for trends, keep us on-track and focused on revenue-driving priorities.

We also take advantage of adjacent innovation. This means one industry can learn from and borrow ideas from other industries that may have already mastered a certain issue. For example, the healthcare industry can borrow ideas about customer service from the retail industry. The hospitality industry can borrow insights from the supply chain industry about inventory and capacity. Because of our deep industry expertise, we can harness the best ideas from across a diverse cross section of industries and markets. We pull those concepts together and explore how they can be used in new applications and situations. It's innovation with a proven foundation.

You have referred to Infor as the "World's Largest Start-Up." How do you maintain an entrepreneurial culture with the size and scale of Infor's business today?

We have called ourselves the World's Largest Start-Up. We value – and work hard to preserve – our innate ability to be agile, creative, and passion-driven, like start-ups often are.

We are quick-thinking and highly-responsive in many ways. From our customer success teams to our account managers and services teams, Infor team members are empowered to make decisions and take action without being encumbered by layers of approvals and policies.

Our mission is to improve business outcomes for our customers and change the way work gets done.

Team leaders are decisive and decisions are supported by data and analytics – just as we advocate to our customers. We live by the best practices we preach. Using our own business intelligence solutions, team leaders stay on top of trends and issues, allowing them to be highly responsive. This leads to agility – one of the greatest advantages of a start-up. So, although we continue to grow, we still stress responsiveness as one of our core values.

Additionally, like start-ups, we know we must work diligently to displace the other enterprises we compete against. We have to be scrappier, faster, smarter, and more imaginative with our efforts. Our personnel, in every office and region, know that their input has a direct impact on our success. Each one counts. That is a "start-up" mentality we never want to lose and we work hard to reinforce it.

On the other hand, we have some ways in which we are quite different from a start-up. We have proven solutions that have withstood the test of time. We also have a solid financial foundation and great resilience. We have deep roots that have taken hold and will not be easily yanked. We have the maturity and wisdom of an enterprise that has weathered some storms, learned from experience, and knows what it means to persevere through volatile times, whether its economic uncertainty, aggressive competition, or shifts in customer demand.

Infor has placed a major focus on building a diverse and inclusive workforce. Why is this so critical and have you been happy with your efforts in this regard?

I truly believe that inclusion and diversity (I&D) drive better business results. Numerous studies show that diverse groups of people who leverage their differences make better decisions than homogenous groups do. I have personally experienced this at Infor. When we bring together diverse teams of colleagues – from across markets, functions, levels, demographics and backgrounds – and they each feel valued for their unique perspectives, we think about challenges in different ways. This enables us to better focus on our customers' needs and build better products.

Infor has always had a strong commitment to I&D, and this past year, we have taken additional steps to increase our focus. We hired our first inclusion and diversity officer (Diana Cruz Solash) with a mandate to enable Infor to become a leading company for I&D, not just in the tech sector, but broadly in the market. Diana has launched a holistic strategy to create an inclusive culture that attracts, values, and leverages all differences. Key efforts have included rolling out an inclusive leadership learning curriculum for all 17,000+ employees globally, establishing an Infor Inclusion Board comprised of 30 influential Infor executives, and making sure we use standard criteria consistently in our hiring and succession decisions. We have also continued our investment in our Women's Infor Network (WIN) – launched in 2014 and with now over 60 chapters around the world – and our Veteran's Infor Network (VIN).

Like many organizations, Infor has been on a journey towards greater inclusion and diversity, and we have made some strides. For example, globally, our workforce is nearly one-third women, and our development and our [SaaS] groups are 30 percent women. That said, there is much more to be done to improve inclusion across all differences in the tech industry, and we are fully committed at Infor to making further progress.

Corporate responsibility and community engagement are core values for Infor. Will you highlight this focus and do you see it as a responsibility of leading companies today to be purpose-driven?

A strong sense of community is one of Infor's core values. Infor maintains multiple corporate citizenship initiatives across the globe because it is our responsibility to support the local communities where our employees live and work, and where our customers do business.

Specifically, we support an ongoing Volunteer Build Program with Habitat for Humanity International that provides giving-back opportunities for many of our employees worldwide in their own communities.

We also support local initiatives that spring from the passion of employees in our local offices, such as the annual Light the Night Walk with the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society in Atlanta, adopting a poor community in Sao Paulo, and beach clean-up in Sri Lanka.

Infor also refurbishes and donates our retired computers to various charitable organization around the world, including the Doe Fund in New York, and most recently in India and Haiti.

We advocate that all leading companies should play the role of a strong corporate citizen, giving back to the communities and people who have supported them.

You are actively engaged in the Partnership for New York City. How critical is it for business leaders to work together to address the needs and challenges of New York City?

No enterprise operates in a vacuum. Our success relies on many external factors, from a reliable infrastructure to a talent pool that is deep and diverse. New York City has supported our growth and ongoing need for highly-skilled talent. As a responsible corporate citizen, we feel compelled to give back and support the community that has supported us. ●