

Thinking Outside the Box

An Interview with
Charles E. Phillips, Jr., Chief Executive Officer, Infor

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to Infor, Charles Phillips was President of Oracle Corporation and a member of its board of directors. Earlier, he was a managing director at Morgan Stanley in the Technology Group. Before his 18-year career on Wall Street, Phillips was a Captain in the U.S. Marine Corps. He holds a B.S. in Computer Science from the U.S. Air Force Academy, a J.D. from New York Law School, and an M.B.A. from Hampton University. He is a member of the Georgia State Bar Association.



Charles E. Phillips, Jr.

Phillips serves on the boards of Viacom Corporation, the American Museum of Natural History, The United States Air Force Academy Endowment Fund, and Phillips Charitable Organizations. Phillips also served on the Obama Administration's Economic Recovery Advisory Board.

COMPANY BRIEF As the world's third-largest supplier of enterprise applications and services, Infor (infor.com) is helping more than 70,000 large and mid-size companies improve operations and drive growth across numerous industry sectors. This month, Infor will officially open its new corporate headquarters in New York City, becoming one of the largest firms in the city's growing technology sector.

Would you highlight Infor's culture of innovation and your focus on product development?

Infor is committed to changing the way our customers work by thinking outside the box. When developing our products, we don't simply ask, what is the next logical step? We push the boundaries to envision new, innovative solutions to challenges that companies face on a daily basis. This is also why we develop our applications for specific micro-verticals, not just industries, because while a bakery and a brewery both fall under food & beverage, their needs are unique. The one-size-fits-all approach to business applications just doesn't cut it anymore. Companies need a solution that exceeds their basic functionality requirements and presents options for managing everything from production to assets in new ways. We always listen to our customers when they express their needs, but we consider it a job well-done when we can anticipate these before they are expressed.

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

We have made careful choices at Infor to preserve an entrepreneurial mentality among employees. The open concept of our New York City headquarters was designed to promote collaboration and brainstorming. Our executive team is accessible and approachable. It's also important for us to remain agile in order to match the pace of a start-up company. We try to make decisions within 24 hours so the momentum never slows. We aren't content with the status quo, and our intentions of disruption are what parallel us to a start-up, despite our size.

How broad is the target market for Infor and how do you define your customer base?

Infor has about 70,000 customers in more than 200 countries and territories around the world. We have large automotive customers like Ferrari, Nissan, and Mitsubishi, but we also cater to smaller customers such as family-owned distributors or hotels. We also have government agencies like the City of Las Vegas and the Denver Public Schools, as well. Our product portfolio is diverse because our customers are diverse, so our target market covers a wide spectrum. We want to provide options to our customers to manage all parts of their business.

Does the U.S. still offer strong opportunities for growth or will much of your expansion come from the emerging markets?

Over the past fiscal year, 57 percent of Infor's revenue was generated in the Americas. Both the U.S. and Latin America offer great opportunity for growth as we continue to enhance products and services, and build applications that are targeted for niches like CAT equipment dealers, fashion accessory manufacturing, or transportation agencies.

However, we are investing heavily in Asia as a target market for growth because there is immense potential to build momentum across several industries there. We've established a goal to double revenue in Asia over the next three years, and we are in a strong position to accomplish this by expanding our local presence, both in employee numbers and through partnerships.

Why is building a diverse and inclusive workforce so critical to your business, and have you been happy with your efforts in this regard?

In order to deliver on our micro-vertical strategy, we need a diverse workforce that includes individuals with in-depth, industry-specific experience. Infor wants people who are passionate about what they do and who can provide a firsthand look

into the daily life of users, like a plant manager or a hospital nurse. Extending beyond traditional functionality, Infor believes in creating a holistic user experience. This is why we formed Hook & Loop, which is an internal creative agency composed of more than 80 writers, designers, developers, and filmmakers, all working together to answer the question: What if people worked the way they live? With backgrounds outside of IT, members of Hook & Loop bring a fresh perspective to help us create software experiences that people love.

Corporate responsibility and community engagement are a core part of Infor's strategy. Do the areas you support align with the business?

Infor maintains multiple corporate citizenship initiatives because it is our responsibility to support the local communities where our employees live and work. We promote opportunities such as our Volunteer Build Program with Habitat for Humanity or the annual Light the Night Walk with the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. These give employees and our company a chance to give back. Sometimes community engagement aligns with our business, such as our work with CodeNow, which is a summer internship program that helps underprivileged students in New York to learn programming languages. But, primarily, it is about leading by example and demonstrating that social responsibility plays a vital role in the success of our organization.

Are you surprised at how the tech sector has grown in New York, and what advantages does New York offer entrepreneurs?

New York offers new opportunities, and a broader pool of talent, than any other place in the world. We moved our headquarters here in 2012 because "Silicon Alley" has continued to build momentum and is known for its high concentration of tech companies, start-ups, engineering firms, and design houses.

You are actively engaged in The Partnership for New York City. Does it surprise you at how close the relationship is among business leaders in New York?

When great minds come together, it is not shocking that relationships based on a common goal, rather than competition, are established. We are all working for the same thing, which is to promote economic development, generate jobs, and prepare our future workforce by supporting the public education system. Without the creativity and influence of these leaders, accomplishing the desired level of change would not be possible. ●