

North Jersey software provider offers timely services

Sunday, January 31, 2010

LAST UPDATED: SUNDAY JANUARY 31, 2010, 10:52 AM

BY JOAN VERDON
THE RECORD
STAFF WRITER

This is a good time to be in the business of helping companies track employee work time and costs. CyberShift Inc. creates software that helps companies schedule employees and keep track of expense accounts at a time when more and more companies are looking to maximize efficiencies and cut costs.



CHRIS PEDOTA/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Robert Farina's Parsippany-based firm specializes in scheduling and expense management.

Robert Farina, 52, joined the Parsippany-based company in 2002 as chief executive officer and has overseen CyberShift's efforts to develop applications that can be used by an increasingly mobile workforce. The privately held company has 200 employees and annual revenue of more than \$30 million, with clients such as Aeropostale, New York & Co., 3M, Texas Instruments and Fox Entertainment. Farina lives in Watchung with his wife and three sons. (Interview condensed for space.)

Q. CyberShift provides software to businesses mostly on a subscription basis?

We provide back-office systems for mid-to-large companies. We're focused around workforce and expense management. It's everything from scheduling employees to tracking time and attendance, absence management, employee expenses. It's the back-office systems that are critical to run a business, but not very

sexy. Most of our new sales are on a subscription basis, what's called software as a service. We started out as a traditional licensing company. We'd sell you a license to our products and you'd install them on your computers. We've now migrated almost completely to software as a service — a subscription-based model.

Q. Customers pay a monthly fee, get a password, and then can access your programs?

Right. You pay a certain amount per month, depending on the number of employees or number of expense reports. You don't own any hardware, you don't install any software, you just have access to our system, which is far easier for most companies. It's a cheaper financial model. You don't have a big upfront cost, and somebody else is managing it, so you don't need the infrastructure.

Robert Farina

Chief executive officer, CyberShift Inc.

His business: Parsippany-based CyberShift provides software and computer services for workforce management functions, such as employee scheduling, time and attendance tracking, and expense management programs.

His background: Born in Verona and raised in Bridgewater, he earned a bachelor's degree from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. Before joining CyberShift as CEO in 2002, he headed two other enterprise software and service businesses, and founded and sold EnableVision, a software consulting and implementation company. Farina began his career at Control Data's Business Information Services Division. He is on the advisory board of the Columbia University master's program for information technology.

Q. Are CyberShift programs mostly used for white-collar workers, as opposed to blue-collar, time-clock-punching systems?

It's actually a little bit of the reverse. Historically, when you think about time and attendance, you think of time clocks, manufacturing plants, but that concept has really evolved quite a bit. It's everything from tracking projects and work orders to mobile employees — employees who don't show up to an office every day. The concept of time and labor management has gone from a blue-collar factory floor to really covering all employees, and we're one of the few companies that provide solutions that have that full range.

Q. What's on the horizon in workforce and expense management?

There are a few big trends. One is the whole subscription software as a service model is really taking off. The other big trend is untethered workers, or mobile workers. When we say untethered workers, it's anybody who doesn't report to an office on a regular basis. If I'm working from home, or if I'm a field service technician, I still need to be able to know what my schedule is. I still need to be able to log my time against different tasks. I may need to get my expenses reimbursed. I may need to approve expenses or vacations for somebody who is working for me. The third trend is employee scheduling. Forecasting the demand for the number of employees and scheduling properly has gotten a lot

of attention now.

Q. Are CEOs comfortable with mobile workforces, or do they still want tethered employees?

I think people have gotten over most of that resistance now. They recognize that they have to go where the talent is, to a great degree. There's been a huge movement to reduce corporate overhead, so who the heck wants to have corporate office space for people who are only showing up once or twice a week? There's also a big dynamic of people who want part-time work — stay-at-home moms, career shifters, contractors. You can go online and say when you are available to work, or switch shifts. It's giving a lot more control to the individual employees.

Q. You have systems where employees can bid for added shifts?

Yes. That's much more common in manufacturing. And retail's overwhelmingly part-time labor. Someone may have children at home and only want to work during school hours. But then Johnny's sick, so they log on and see if they can swap their shift with somebody else. They don't get stressed out by having to find child care, they find somebody else who wants the hours. And all the manager has to do is approve it. It takes a lot of the labor cost out of it.

Q. When you reach the CEO level, do you still have to fill out a timecard?

A lot of companies do mandate it. Not necessarily a timecard, per se, but certainly what's called absence management — vacation, sick time, Family Medical Leave Act. Or if you're charging time to any particular project.

Q. You're not in the CyberShifters [the company band] by any chance?

No. Believe me, nobody would want me in the CyberShifters. I would be clearing the room if I were in the CyberShifters.

Q. I saw their videos on YouTube. They're good. And their entire play list is songs about time.

You noticed that! That's great. We have the tie-in.

Exec Access appears every Sunday.

E-mail: verdon@northjersey.com