

WEST TOWN WEB SERVICES

Software Outsourcing - Software Development

info@westtownwebservices.com

Hi I'm Tony Radford from West Town Web Services. We are UK based great value, high quality software development and outsourcing solutions business. If you need software built or looked after please get in touch.

The following is a transcription of an interview I did with Tim Dobson of Bytemark Hosting who gives some great advice on how to choose the best web hosting solution for your business.

The recording is here:

<http://westtownwebservices.com/three-tips-choose-web-hosting/>

The following is a transcription of an interview I

Tony: I'm talking to Tim Dobson of Bytemark Hosting. Good Morning Tim.

Tim Dobson: Good morning.

Tony: Thanks for joining us. To get us started why don't you just tell us a little bit about yourself and your background.

Tim Dobson: Sure. So I am Tim Dobson. I am the Community Wrangler at Bytemark and we are a technical no-nonsense hosting provider from the UK for people who know that they want a reliable solution.

Tony: Right. Great. Thanks very much. And what is Community Wrangler mean?

Tim Dobson: Well so basically, I wear many hats literally and metaphorically, and if there is something that needs doing or there is someone that needs talking to I go out there and talk to them and get involved and help wherever I can.

Tony: Right, great. So you are very much involved in with your clients and the needs an understanding of what they need?

Tim Dobson: Absolutely. So I just speak to lots of perspective clients. I speak to lots of community projects that we might support. And I speak to existing customers just to check that things are going okay and seeing how things are going.

Tony: Fabulous. And so how long has Bytemark been in business?

WEST TOWN WEB SERVICES

Software Outsourcing - Software Development

info@westtownwebservices.com

Tim Dobson: So we've been trading for 11 years. There are two directors Matthew and Pete started the business running originally back on the earliest kind of precursor the virtualization technology. And since then we've built the business up to a 23 people and 2.5 million turn over and have our own Data Center here in York in the UK.

Tony: Great. And, roughly are your clients sort of spread throughout the UK or?

Tim Dobson: Yes so we have a rough spread of clients around the UK and then all around the world from small island nations to the US and Eastern Europe. We have customers all over the world.

Tony: Ah fantastic. Small island nations that is interesting. I mean is there a sort of typical profile for an ideal customer for Bytemark?

Tim Dobson: I think the ideal customer is someone who's got a UK audience who they need to service with a great deal of reliability. So they need to know that the service that they are delivering to the UK customers performs well and performs as well as the customers expect it to. And really, from there we just kind of work with the customer and build a solution that works well for them.

Tony: Right. Great. Okay, thank you for that introduction. So I wondered if you could give us three tips from the hosting world for businesses?

Tim Dobson: Absolutely. So I was just thinking it would be quite interesting to explain how a low end hosting solution works and you know what that pros and cons of working out what the best value for money solution you can get is. It's perfectly possible to pay 10 £ a year for hosting; which can be a nice cost saving for small businesses. But, it's important to understand what you get for that. Ultimately when things go wrong do you know who to call and what's the impact on your business of five minutes an hour, a day's down time? Everybody's got different tolerances and it's important to understand what you're buying and what you are expecting from it; especially in terms of risk. On the low end hosting providers will provide you with a piece of technical equipment that you can configure or a contractor can configure for you. And, the hosting provider will just make sure that your server has power running to it, it's connected to a network and it's you or your contractors responsibility to configure the software in a way that's reliable

WEST TOWN WEB SERVICES

Software Outsourcing - Software Development

info@westtownwebservices.com

or the way that works for your business. You will need to set up the backups, the monitoring, make sure the updates are running and applied successfully. And if something goes wrong at 3am on a Saturday morning you or your contractor will be the person fixing it.

Tony: Right okay.

Tim Dobson: So if your contractor's not free or something, that is something you will need to think about and work out how to deal with. And, many small business owners actually chose this approach because it gives them a great degree of flexibility to configure their server precisely how they'd like it. And, because they are doing it themselves they are reducing the costs by not paying someone else to do it. On the other hand if you are in kind of a plan that you don't understand the technical land where you are not even sure what to google it can be quite an intimidating situation.

Tony: Absolutely.

Tim Dobson: Especially if you've got clients clambering on your door and asking you to do things yesterday when you are not really sure why exactly it's not working.

Tony: Yeah 100% agree with you.

Tim Dobson: So at the high end it's like you've kind of outsourced a full time job and outsourced all the risk that goes with it. So instead of just having a server you will have a server. Or rather, a team of system administrators working around the clock to make sure your business keeps functioning. So you'll have people kind of with lots of experience thinking about making the backups run or making sure the site is monitored with automated tools that ensure that we know if it stops working or making sure that the operating systems update are applied successfully so the server is less likely to be hacked or have any kind of security issues. And then there is always someone there 24/7 to make sure, to listen to any concerns you might have. So I guess it's where you kind of outsource your hosting is like you are out sourcing your risk. I guess it's a bit like leasing a car.

So when you lease a car from a car leasing firm it's like you are not any responsible for making the engine work or if the car breaks down you can just say

WEST TOWN WEB SERVICES

Software Outsourcing - Software Development

info@westtownwebservices.com

to the leasing company “give me a new one”. Whereas when you buy a second hand car it’s up to you to kind of do the maintenance on it or take it to the garage. And at the end of the day if the car breaks down, well if you are going on an important trip you need to be confident that the car is not going to break down or maybe you don’t; it depends on your business. It’s a choice that you make and can only really kind of be something that you weigh up and it might well be--

Tony: Yeah.

Tim Dobson: --Sorry go ahead.

Tony: --No I was going to say, --I mean if you are running a business then to my mind you should really be focusing on running a business and not wasting your time on trying to become a systems administrator.

Tim Dobson: It certainly depends how valuable your time is, how much business you’ve got coming in, and a host of other things. It might be that your business is quite similar to systems administration into its kind of mode of essences or that you really enjoy systems administration as a kind of hobby that you do on the side because you are interested in how computers work and it seems like a fun side effect of your otherwise boring business. [Laugh] Believe me there are people out there who find it this way. But, for as many people it’s a completely scary prospect and understandably so. Especially when it has real world consequences where customers are on your back and upset because they can’t see their invoices or can’t see their websites.

Tony: Right. So I’ve got, --imagine that I am a client and I’ve been running my website with an e-commerce application on some host data hosting. And, I am starting to have performance issues. I come to you guys, and what do you do? Do you just sort of say “okay”, -- I mean do you move the site over or how would you help me if I was a client in that situation?

Tim Dobson: So first of all we would just talk to you to understand your business because the most important thing isn’t the technical kind of details, the important thing is to understand what your tolerance to down time is. How much technical expertise you have in house because we don’t want to trend on anyone’s feet or do anything that will upset anyone. But, we will probably move your site across to its own

WEST TOWN WEB SERVICES

Software Outsourcing - Software Development

info@westtownwebservices.com

server; make sure that it's got lots of monitoring about performance so that we know if the site is moving slowly. Make sure that we've got, --make sure that you are aware of how to contact us 24/7 so that you know what to do if you feel that you need to speak to us for any reason. And, make sure that we've got backups if something goes wrong we can restore it precisely how it was.

Tony: Yeah. Okay, thank you.

Tim Dobson: No problem at all. So, I mean I guess the most important thing when you have any kind of thoughts about hosting, --and this goes for all the business is to find someone who you can trust to talk about it in a way that you feel that you are getting unbiased and reasonable information about the options that are open to you and helping you understand not just what might be good things for you to do but to help you understand the whole industry in a simple and easy to understand, hopefully quick way. And there are loads of people that you can talk to. I mean your web designers come across as the people who are most asked about hosting and reasonably so because they might have dealt with other clients who have had similar kinds of issues. Obviously consultants and maybe hosting company sales people. It's possible even if you don't know one of these people you've got a friend whose part time job is doing one of these things and asking somebody who you already have a relationship with about what they think is a good idea is always a good approach.

So if like I wanted to buy a used car I'd probably talk to my brother. He's bought and sold a number of them. He knows the kind of ways that people talk and can suggest the most obvious things that I should be aware of when I am looking at what I might want to be thinking about there. And a good hosting company representative will help you in the same manner. They will be helping you understand the whole market place allowing you to kind of evaluate their company across the entire range. And, a good kind of point of whether you've got the right one is someone who will recommend you a competitor's product if they don't have something suitable available because their job is to make it as easy to understand and clear for you as possible and guide you to the best possible solution that is right for you.

WEST TOWN WEB SERVICES

Software Outsourcing - Software Development

info@westtownwebservices.com

And also there is also a kind of a degree of correlation between cost and price. It's important to kind of think that you actually just want to find the product that best fits your needs. So even if you have an incredibly large budget sometimes finding the thing that actually works best for you rather than paying for services that you don't need; there are pushy sales people obviously who will try and persuade you that theirs is the most advanced and you might want to kind of think about how much you trust them to tell you if something goes wrong and be upfront with you if they need to apologize for something. So it's just about talking to people and making sure you have feel that you can have a good relationship with the person that you are speaking to.

Tony: Yeah. So Tim, so, so far we have point number 1 which basically is consider your business requirements. Point number 2 is gather information, talk to trust worthy people. And what would you say number 3 is? What is the third piece of advice you could give us?

Tim Dobson: The third piece of advice would be to try and ask the hosting company for as much detail about the infrastructure that they have and the thought they put into designing it. So it might kind of sound obvious to some people but building reliable infrastructure is quite important to a hosting company. But, the degree to which they think about it and embody it into their business can go to varying degrees. So, for instance at Bytemark in our Data Centers we have multiple network connections to many of our servers. So that if one of these network connections fails there is always a second one. But this kind of process actually just goes throughout the whole infrastructure from top to bottom. So there is multiple power supplies running all the way around the building or Data Center where the servers are hosted.

Tony: Right, right. So if I, --assuming I am not technical but I am doing what you say am I am going to ask the hosting company about their infrastructure what specifically, -- could you tell us what specifically we should ask? So one of them was redundancy or power supplies.

Tim Dobson: So I guess you could ask them a number of things. You could ask them if you could see their network map or network diagram. So that's the kind of diagram of their core network that will show you who their upstream providers are and it's

WEST TOWN WEB SERVICES

Software Outsourcing - Software Development

info@westtownwebservices.com

completely understandable for hosting companies to have upstream providers. They are not resellers these are kind of connections to the internet and you want every hosting providers to have at least two but two would be kind of a just okay hosting company. The more upstream connectivity a provider has from different providers the more reliable, the more peace of mind that you can have that their infrastructure has been built by people who really care about reliability. So I think that Bytemark has three or four points where we connect to external providers. And, we've got a network diagram on our website.

Another thing you can ask would be normal things like how many power supplies does my server have? Or, how many network connections does my server have? And, whilst there is kind of cost tradeoffs here it's worth all, --what's the power, - -how redundant does the power that my server is connected to? Or, do you have a generator for if your main power connection dies? Now every hosting provider should say "yes" to if they have a generator. The interesting thing would be if they say that "yes we've got more than one generator" They might say this in a way "and plus one" which means just the number we need plus one more for extra spares. But the more you can get out of the hosting provider about how they've thought about their infrastructure in terms of reliability the more you can be confident that actually they've put a lot of thought into this and their system is going to be quite reliable.

Another thing you might want to check out is if they've got a status page or some kind of network issues, outage logs. Go and have a look at it. It's worth bearing in mind that it's not necessarily bad if they've recently had issues being reported on their network because lots of providers, --if you look at for example Amazon Web Service status pages it will be, --there will be things there that have happened recently. What's important is that they are needing very clear and open with the customers, so you, and explaining "this is what's happened and we are going to take full responsibility for this problem that has happened at our end." So this kind of transparency can be really illuminating if you just go on it slightly and try and find out whether the providers actually who they say they are.

Tony: Yeah. Okay, that is great. Thank you, thank you very much Tim.

Tim Dobson: My pleasure, my pleasure.

WEST TOWN WEB SERVICES

Software Outsourcing - Software Development

info@westtownwebservices.com

Tony: So basically point one consider business requirements. Number two make sure you gather information and talk to trust worthy people. And then, number three ask the hosting company about their infrastructure. In other words, questions like can is see your network map, how many power supplies, how redundant is the power to my server, do they have a generator, you know do they have a status page, and things like that. So that is really, really useful/

Tim Dobson: Absolutely Tony.

Tony: Okay. And if people want to contact you or contact Bytemark what's the best way to do that?

Tim Dobson: Sure. So the best way if you want to speak to me directly is to email hello@bytesmark.co.uk that is B-Y-T-E-M-A-R-K or just go to bytemark.co.uk; though I imagine there will be notes in the links in the show notes.

Tony: Yeah absolutely. Okay Tim, thank you very much for your time. Much appreciated.

Tim Dobson: My pleasure Tony. Thanks.

Tony: Okay.

WEST TOWN WEB SERVICES

Software Outsourcing - Software Development

info@westtownwebservices.com

About West Town Web Services

I have 14 years' experience of managing software development projects and outsourcing services. Our teams have provided high quality software solutions and services for a diverse range of end-user clients. Our developers are experienced, talented, motivated problem solvers. We are committed to developing strong working relationships with our clients. We are honest, good to work with and we deliver.

Our services include:

Outsourcing services

Thousands of companies now outsource some or all of their software development, partly because of the cost savings but also for access to high quality skills and very hard working, motivated and creative staff.

Abandoned Software

Sometimes the software company that built your business critical application is no longer available. Contact us if this has happened to you. We will quickly tell you if we can support the application, fix bugs and develop it further.

Software Development

We have built many software applications over the years. We offer a collaborative approach which ensures we understand your requirements and deliver a high quality solution on time and to budget.

Contact:

Please feel free to contact me:

Tel: +39 329 0994440

Email: tony@westtownwebservices.com

Skype: [tony.radford](https://www.skype.com/people/tony.radford)