



RT: For those who aren't familiar with ConnectWise, could you give a brief overview?

AB: ConnectWise is a community-driven software company, dedicated to the success of our customers. We help them manage their business better, sell faster and more effectively, automate and control technology with our ConnectWise suite of products.

RT: What does the suite of products incorporate?

AB: That includes a professional service automation solution, which we call Manage. It also includes remote monitoring and management (RMM) with Automate, remote control (Control) and Sell, our quote and proposals solution.

What's unique about it is that these are the main products that all technology solution providers need to effectively run their business, so we've got them packaged together and been making acquisitions of these products over the last 10 years.

We've now got a really great, seamless integration between all of them, as well as a consistent user interface and experience. It's been an amazing journey for us, but what I get the most satisfaction from is watching our partners grow and have success.

We really believe in technology and that it's probably the world's greatest hope to solve most of its problems. We feel that it's a calling for us to help, make our customers succeed, so we're honoured to have so many of them worldwide.

RT: You've talked about disruption or breakthroughs, and you see technology of a great hope for the future, but can you talk more about that? Where do you see technology making a difference on a day to day basis?

AB: If you think about all the technological advances that are happening now, or read anything from Gartner or IBC, they all talk about a wave of disruption that's going through every business and industry today. Every business is really becoming a technology business, because they can't survive without it.

The question is, who's going to implement all this technology? Who's going to support it all? Our answer is that it's going to be our customers, the ConnectWise partners. That's why we see this as a calling, because it's very important to get that technology implemented and embedded.

There are so many examples of technology solving problems that the world has never been able to solve before, and it's our greatest hope, so it's an interesting concept.

Look at the automotive and transportation industries and the example of Tesla, how they're completely disrupting and changing the whole automotive industry simply because they approached an automobile from a very different perspective. They said 'Let's start with technology and a computer and build a car around it.' That's one great example, because they've got every single manufacturer in the world running to create greater technology inside of their automobiles.

Another great example is power – solar power holds the opportunity to let us unplug from every other fossil fuel on earth. It's only going to require 440,000 square miles of solar panels (about the size of Columbia) to be able to power the entire world.

These are problems that the world needs to solve, such as self-driving automobiles. We won't have fatalities any more, because the computer's not going to wreck into another car, or at least it won't once we get it right and it's debugged!

There's a lot of great hope for things like the healthcare industry, which is being completely transformed by technology as well. All the world's problems are being solved.

I talk about big ideas, but I also want to bring it down into something more practical that we feel that our partners and customers can take advantage of today, because we think there are amazing opportunities that are sitting right in front of us.

A lot of people get into this industry with the latest and greatest thing, and if you're coming into it now, you're probably focused on managed services, which is great. But, you can't just

look at one aspect of technology, because it's always moving. Just as it's disrupting every industry, it's continuously moving forward.

For example, cloud services are going to be an important new service, a practise area, that every technology solution provider will need to offer to their clients. We're very focused on understanding where the industry's going and where the opportunities will be, not just today but two, three, four or five years from now, and making sure that our customers are able to take advantage of those early. We want them to make plans early to get into those new aspects of technology.

RT: How big is the ConnectWise community now, in terms of MSPs (managed service providers)?

AB: We have such a strong presence with MSPs, and I think that's because we have a great solution for them, but it's also the latest and greatest and what's catching on worldwide. It's been going great gang-busters in North America for a long time and now here in Europe as well, so we're seeing it spread worldwide.

RT: Let's talk about your journey. For those who may be unfamiliar with it, let's rewind. ConnectWise was born out a specific need for one of your businesses, so could you tell us about that?

AB: It was an interesting journey for us. I worked at Price Waterhouse Cooper as a technology consultant, and when the PC came out we realised it was going to change the world. It was interesting, because my father was branch manager for IBM at the time, and he said to me: 'Arnie, no! PCs are going to be for the hobbyists! We'll sell maybe 10,000 of these worldwide.' That was one of the few times I disagreed with my father!

So, I left Price Waterhouse and started ConnectWise, and the rest is history. We created our own company in the Tampa Bay area, as a technology solutions provider, doing networks and selling and implementing PCs. This started in 1982, so we became very profitable and successful, but as we grew we were running into massive roadblocks.

We were trying to run our business on four or five different applications, with contacts in ACCPAC (accounting software), spreadsheets for time, a big whiteboard for scheduling and used Microsoft Project for project management, and none of these products talked to each other.

After David (co-founder) and I had got married and had kids, we realised we were missing out on baseball games, turning up late to dinner and spending all weekends trying to send invoices out. This was when we started creating our own solution specifically to solve our own problems, because necessity is the mother of invention.

Once we created the solution, we started it showing it to our many friends in the technology industry, and they asked for copies of it. That's how the ConnectWise software side of the business started.

We are our customers, and we like to say to them: “We are you, because we come from the same place.” In fact, we still have that company today, bringing in £3.5m a year, 30% of our bottom line.

It’s our petri dish, because we’re constantly able to experiment with our own company. It gives us a massive domain expertise so that we understand what needs to happen next with our software suite. It’s not software first for us, it was about understanding the industry, being part of it, having success and wanting to share that with others through our solution.

RT: ConnectWise as a company is worldwide now. Can you talk about your expansion plans?

AB: We have an office in central London which is our European headquarters, and we’ve been growing very rapidly, so what’s next for us is to continue to focus on expanding our presence in Europe.

We’re also taking the opportunity to go to Australia, where we have a large number of partners, and will be opening an office soon. Our next office will probably be in Germany, which should open in late 2018 or 2019. That’s the journey that we see ahead of us.

RT: As a CEO, what’s the biggest challenge you have for managing what is now a distributed workforce worldwide?

AB: We drink our own champagne, so we use our own solution to run our entire business. Unlike our competitors, who use different solutions, we use all of our own products. What’s great about that is we have massive collaborations that happen because we use our solutions worldwide and are able to coordinate very well with that.

RT: You’ve been CEO of the company for a number of years now. What would you say is the one thing that’s remained constant in the IT industry, which has been full of change? What’s the one idea or value which remains true today, as much as when you first started as CEO?

AB: Basic moral values and not compromising them. Being transparent with your customers, being honest and offering any solution you have at a very fair price. Those are things that have always done us well, because it’s all about relationships and creating trust with whoever you’re doing business with, whether it’s as a solutions provider or as a software company.

Our focus cannot be making money – that has to be the by-product of doing a great job for our customers. We’ve always been very focused on that and it hasn’t changed, because it’s done us an amazing service.

We're the only company out there which hasn't had a loan; we have no debt or venture capital, so we can focus on our customers and do an amazing job for them. I think that's because of the basic tenets that we've never compromised on.

RT: How do you remain in touch with your customers worldwide on a daily and week to week basis?

AB: Events such as IT Nation (*where the interview was recorded*). It's a great way to stay in touch with our customers. There are 350 people attending, so that's one way. Also, there's also an IT Nation event in North America with up to 3,000 attendees every year.

Beyond that, we're also really focused on community, because we think it's really important to focus on building that for the technology industry we serve. We know they can learn a lot from us because we have domain expertise, but it's not just about what we know, it's about them sharing best practices with each other.

We have a number of community events – IT Nation Europe, IT Nation North America, we have 40 user group meetings throughout the world every year, so any time we can engage with our partners, share our knowledge and have them share theirs, that's where we think it's creating a great advantage.

That's what makes us different, because we invest in the community. We've seen a lot of benefits from that, mostly for our partners and customers because of the community focus.

RT: I attended the user group meeting recently in London and I was blown away by all the support the members were giving each other.

AB: There is no secret sauce. If we all help each other, all boats rise in the tide, and that's been the philosophy and the concept of our community outreach all along. It's been very successful in the UK and everywhere else we've gone, and I think people really appreciate that we put in that effort to create community.

That's where we get a lot of our satisfaction, because it's about watching them be much more successful in their business. If we do that, they're able to implement more technology, spread it further, deeper and wider, and our calling is to make that happen and to create successful technology companies. We believe this is how we'll make our small change to make the world better.

RT: In your view, having been in the MSP industry for a long time, and seeing the growth of the industry on both sides of the pond, what is the biggest difference you see between US MSPs and those in the UK and Europe?

AB: Americans are a little brash and loud, no-holds-barred, and in the UK business owners are more deliberate, which I really like. What happens in America is that they grab the latest technology and run with it like a bunch of cowboys. That's not necessarily a bad thing. There

out there on the front, taking arrows in the back, trying to make things work and pioneering things.

In the UK, people say: “Prove it to me, and then we’ll do it. And when we do it, we’re going to do it at the highest level.” The cultural philosophy is different, which is interesting, but we definitely understand the differences between the two. We see those differences and honour them both, because they both have their advantages.

RT: ConnectWise have always had a really good UK presence, even without feet on the ground in the UK. Why are you putting people in now?

AB: Well, we’ve had feet on the ground for the last five years, but we’ve really been doubling down on our efforts. We took the office in central London two years ago and started to grow the staff. The answer is plain and simple – once you have a certain number of partners in a geographic area, you owe it to them to be in their country.

You owe it to the economy to bring that revenue to that country, so we have a UK operation, we’re creating job opportunities and hiring bright young talent, and I think that’s a civic duty.

Number two, you have to do that to honour your customers where they are, and be where they are. We have more and more UK partners, so it makes sense to grow in the country.

RT: A personal question: you mentioned your dad earlier, and you decided to ignore his advice about the PC. What was the best advice your dad ever gave you?

AB: My dad was a career IBM branch manager, and he said to me when I was heading off to college, calling me Arnie Barney so I knew I had to pay attention: “I have given my life to IBM and worked very hard for them, and if I had put my effort into my own business, it would be really interesting to see where I’d be now.”

He never said, ‘go and open your own business’, but that was his way of saying, ‘that’s something you probably want to think about’, so he really put the spirit of entrepreneurship in me.

That was probably the best advice he ever gave me, because what’s been awesome about it is to be able to have an idea, vision or concept that I feel I can use to benefit the world and to see it grow, there’s no greater joy in life. That’s a vocation, it’s not a job, and I think that’s what he was able to instil in me.

RT: Who else would you cite as being a big influence on your personal success?

AB: I’d have to say Elon Musk. He is a contemporary, living today. The man is amazing, because not only is he talented, he has a vision and is trying to make the world a better place. He’ll go to any lengths to make that happen, even bankruptcy.

He makes big bets, he goes all in, and he's not afraid, and I love that. It's not about the money, and I love that too. He's trying to make the world a better place, and if he happens to make money along the way, good for him. It seems to be working out for him.

RT: We talked about fear, and you strike me as a man who has very little fear! You got up at 5am to have a run across Hyde Park, and athletics, strength and competition are big parts of your life. Talk to me about what you've done in the past in terms of personal challenges. How have you stretched yourself?

AB: When I turned 50, I started going through my bucket list. One of the things on there was to participate in an Ironman, and another was to swim the English Channel. I completed three Ironmans, so then I swam the Channel in 2013.

That was a big life accomplishment, and it got me very engaged with British culture, because I spent a lot of time practising in the water at Dover. The reason I've done those things is to help myself as a CEO and entrepreneur, because what I learned from all of that was about discipline, training and facing my fears.

I didn't think I could swim the Channel, so I wanted to see if I could surprise myself and overcome that fear. It's a physical feat of course, but it's 90% mental, because you have to keep going, no matter how cold it gets. I actually failed, because on my first attempt I was four miles from the French coast and went into hypothermia. But I came back the following year and completed it.

Then I decided to go for the triple crown, to swim around Manhattan, and then swim from Catalina Island to the shores of LA, and the Tampa Bay Marathon, which is all 24 miles of Tampa Bay. Those are just challenges I throw in front of myself, because I always like to have a huge physical challenge at the same time as I have the business ones. It keeps me balanced.

RT: Does it have a knock-on effect? Does how you challenge yourself physically on a personal level inspire success as an entrepreneur and encourage you to try harder?

AB: It does. I try much harder as an entrepreneur, because I know you can't give up – you can reach your goal. As Jim Collins says, it's about the 20-mile march. Get up and do what you have to do every day. Success is never an instant in time, it's about those 20-mile marches you made over and over again, and I think a lot of people get that confused. People are looking for a quick hit and immediate success, and that just doesn't exist.

Jim Collins' book *Great by Choice* is perfect for every technology company out there, because it addresses the key fundamentals of success, and that's what's really driven home to me.

RT: As an entrepreneur, what would you say is the best decision you've ever made?

AB: I think it was to go into business and pursue my passion – to spread technology. I've been doing this for 35 years now, and when we first started with the PC, I was being charged out by PWC to consult on mainframes and minicomputers at \$125 an hour. I realised that that was technology being put in the hands of very few companies in the world, so the PC was revolutionary to me.

It meant that we could put the power of the PC into everyone's hands, and that was what really caught my attention, so I dedicated my whole life to spreading that, and making sure that others could spread the technology too.

RT: Are you a man prone to regrets? Is there anything you look back on and would have changed in your career?

AB: No, I really don't. I have no regrets, because I feel that every challenge or defeat I've had was a victory. When people ask me about the English Channel, I never talk about when I made it, I talk about the year I didn't make it and all the lessons I learned from that. I think a lot of failures in life can set you up for success if you're looking at it the right way.

RT: What did you learn from that? What was going through your mind when you were four miles off the coast of France and the hypothermia was about to set in – can you share that?

AB: When you swim the Channel and hypothermia sets in, your feet will go numb first, then your fingers, and it moves up your legs and arms until the only thing that's not numb is your torso, and that's your body's way of saying to you: "Get out of the water! You're getting ready to kill yourself!"

I got out of the water, and I really didn't want to, because I could see the cars going along the coast in France. I knew that I needed to live to try this another day, because it wasn't my life goal, it was just an interesting event I wanted to complete.

I wanted to learn from my mistakes, and immediately came up with a list of 20 things that I could do better, so the following year I just worked down that list. That's what you learn from defeat – don't mope, make a list of what you could do better, then go out and do it.

RT: How quickly did you do that? Was that list being written in your head while you were returning in the boat?

AB: I was so exhausted that it took me a day before I could even get out of bed. As soon as I did, I started thinking about whether I was going to do it again. I knew I would, because I don't quit, so that's when I started making the list.

RT: Based on what you've seen of the growing MSP market, what should MSPs serving the SMB (small and medium businesses) be very aware of for the next 18 months?

AB: There has been a set of products which have really fuelled the MSP industry, and that's Microsoft's stack – exchange servers, SQL (Structured Query Language) servers, Office

productivity (Word, PowerPoint, OneNote) – all under the roof of the client. Those are mission-critical tools that cannot go down, because the productivity of the office workers is stopped dead in its tracks. You can't survive without email.

That's the one constant, and that stack of solutions is popping up into the Cloud. Microsoft is offering Office 365, it's absolutely the direction they're going. They don't want to sell licences on premises any more, so one of the main reasons managed services have evolved is because of that mission-critical technology.

My message is: "Follow where that technology is going, and be good at delivering Cloud services." We've created a solution which is completely integrated to the ConnectWise platform called Cloud Console, and it lets you manage, monitor and bill your Office 365 instances.

We've noticed that companies which use Cloud Console and have followed the technology have been able to maintain their managed service contracts with each client, move their Office stack to the Cloud and help them understand how to be more productive with it.

People don't understand that there's a whole consulting engagement around centralising your files and making them accessible from anywhere at any time. There's one for OneNote and also for SharePoint, so it's not just about Word, Excel and PowerPoint, it's about those consulting engagements too.

What successful MSPs have done is also become Cloud solution providers, and what they've done is not only maintain their revenue but increase it, because they're adding a whole new layer on top of it.

Microsoft might have created the reason for MSPs, but they're never going away, because the need to manage and monitor and keep the technology under the client's roof up and running is always going to be there. You need to provide the Cloud service solution as well, and own that stack in it.

RT: What's next for ConnectWise?

AB: We have all kinds of plans, but what we're really focused on now is tight, seamless integrations of our entire platform, a consistent user interface and experience, similar to what you see with the Microsoft stack of products.

We're also looking two or three years ahead and figuring out what our customers need. We knew Cloud services were going to be important, so we created Cloud Console. We believe that chat is also significant, because the new generation coming into the workforce is going to expect you to be able to provide chat support.

We're focused on filling in the cracks on the ConnectWise platform, and then expanding that ecosystem. We're very focused on open, robust APIs (application programming interfaces) so that anyone can access the ConnectWise platform, thereby expanding that ecosystem.

We want to give people lots of choices so they can't go wrong. They can get any application they want and it'll integrate.