



# Complete IT Solutions

Written by Claire Suttles

**N**orthern Micro was recently recognized as one of the fastest growing Canadian firms by both CRN (*Computer Reseller News*) and The Channel Company's annual ranking of North American IT firms. Its balanced technology portfolio and expanding software and services portfolio has helped it to thrive in an ever-changing IT marketplace.

Northern has differentiated itself as clients shift their focus to outcomes – away from being IT integrators.

Northern processed over 10,000 personal systems, through its white-glove concierge services, leveraging its unique ISO and Government of Canada certified integration centre in March alone. "We deliver a broad range of solutions," says Business Development Manager Alex Yeh, "catering to our clients while also assisting our technology partners to excel."

"We enjoy doing the heavy lifting," proclaims Emily Martin – Director Enterprise Technology, referencing a special niche her team has carved. Northern Micro was an early adopter and full service provider of "Converged Systems," replacing the traditional do-it-yourself datacentre with simplified, integrated systems. "We have the expertise to stand-up converged solutions properly the first time, leveraging our facilities and experience." Today this technology is supporting a broad range of uses, from video-surveillance systems to traditional application environments.

"We deliver a broad range of solutions," says Mr. Yeh. "From networking, database storage, and data security to mobile and desktop computing devices, the team is able to deploy customized, market-leading technology. Based in Ottawa, the company also maintains offices in Quebec City and Halifax.

Northern Micro partners with industry leaders such as Dell EMC, VCE, Cisco, and Hewlett Packard Enterprise to ensure access to the most advanced solutions. Converged Infrastructure is one specialized solution that has earned Northern Micro national renown. "In Canada we are known to be the experts in Converged Infrastructure," Mr. Yeh says. The solution groups multiple IT components into a single, optimized computing package and centralizes management to consolidate systems, increase resource utilization rates, and lower costs.

Mr. Yeh compares the approach to building an automobile. "If you wanted to build a car you might buy an engine, you might buy the wheels, you might buy the chassis, you might buy the steering wheel—all separately—and then assemble it in your garage. But really what you want is to just buy the car so that you don't need to have the skills [required] to build it and test it and validate it every time." Converged Infrastructure is the practice of assembling every component into a seamless solution so that the customer does not have to lift a finger. ➔



 Herman Yeh  
Founder of Northern Micro

*Northern Micro is an Ottawa, Ontario-based IT Solution Provider with a portfolio spanning the Desktop to the Datacentre. Founded in 1985 by Herman Yeh, the company has grown to over 60 staff across Toronto, Ottawa, Montréal, Québec and Halifax. The company is expanding on its roots of deep expertise in the Canadian Federal and Education markets, with revenues approaching \$100 million annually.*

**“What separates us from the competition is that we have a deep level of expertise for all of these technologies.”**



▶ Not only does the team take care of every step of the process, they customize the solution to fit each customer. “Every solution is slightly different. Having a cookie cutter data center really doesn’t exist because every application has certain needs, whether it be computing power, faster networking, or storage.”

In addition, Northern Micro can deliver the solution much faster than the traditional timeline. “It used to take 60 to 90 days to build a data center. By following Converged Infrastructure methodology it has reduced that time to deploy to as little as 20 days. So there is a compelling savings in time to deployment.” The approach also prevents mistakes and redundancies. Before Northern Micro introduced a complete solution, “the general practice of building a data center was to take different components from networking, storage and compute and then assemble them onsite and then hope that it works,” Mr. Yeh recalls.

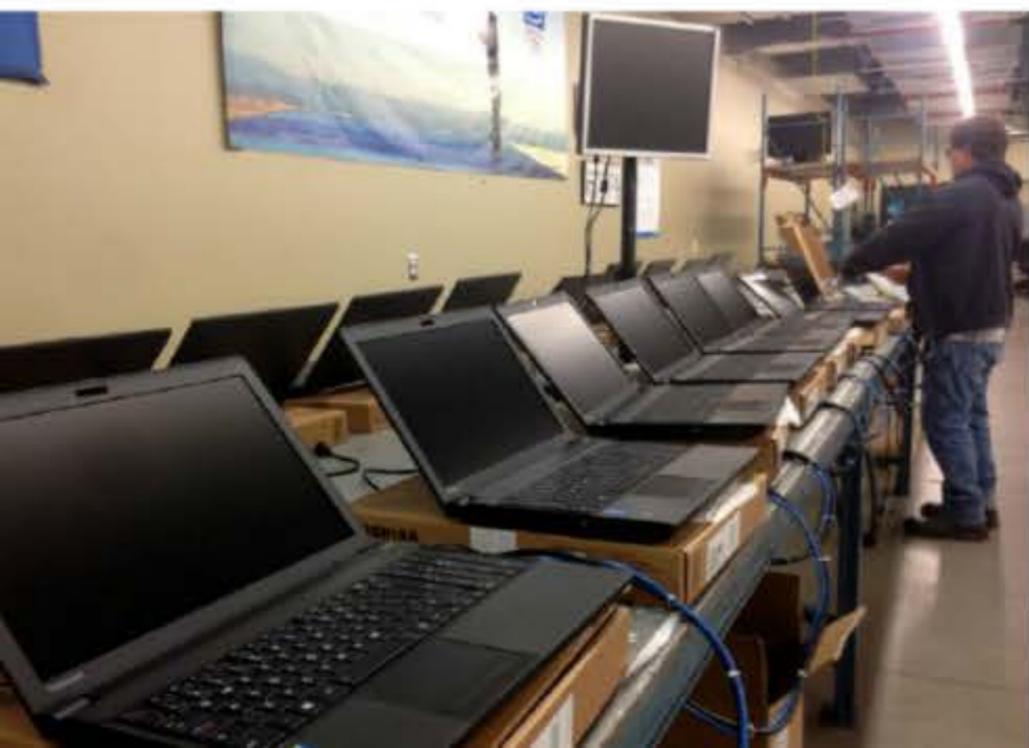
In order to deliver full service solutions, Northern Micro maintains a roster of experts who are able to tackle the trickiest challenges. “What separates us from the competition is that we have a deep level of expertise for all of these technologies with networking, with storage, with virtualization, with architecture, with diverse infrastructures. We have some of the highest certified staff in-house. Our competitors may have to leverage a third party to do that, but [we have them] in-house on a fulltime permanent basis.”

The company’s industry-leading solutions have led to significant growth and success. In August, Northern Micro was recognized as the fastest growing Canadian firm listed on CRN’s 2016 Solution Provider 500; the company was one of only 22 Canadian firms to make the list. In addition, Northern Micro was ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> on The Channel Company’s CRN Fast Growth 150 list, an annual ranking of North America-based IT firms with gross sales of at least \$1 million that have experienced significant economic growth over the past two years. Only four other Canadian firms earned a spot on the coveted list.

Mr. Yeh credits the company’s strategic partnership with HP Inc. (HPI) for Northern Micro’s rapid growth. A market leader in computer equipment, HPI was established when HP divided into two independent companies, HPI and Hewlett-Packard Enterprise. HPI focuses on the production of software and devices for both home and corporate users including desktop computers, workstations, portable and hybrid computers, printers, scanners, and monitors.

“HP is a fantastic partner because they have a huge capability of manufacturing in large numbers and they have significant resources to build various sets of devices that are suitable for ▶

**“We chose to partner with Ottawa 2017 because Northern Micro is a locally based company in Ottawa and we wanted to support local community initiatives. Ottawa 2017 is important as part of the identity of Ottawa and Northern Micro wants to contribute to that identity.”**



the customer,” Mr. Yeh points out. “And then Northern Micro comes in because we provide value-added services that the end user demands. For example, that might be imaging, asset tagging, bulk packaging, and staged shipping—these are capabilities that OEM manufacturers might not have a competency in or an interest to pursue. So that is where Northern Micro really adds value – we have one of the only facilities in the Canada that can provide these services at large scales. Our partnership is really about complementing each other’s strengths to really make everyone successful: HPI, Northern Micro, and our customers.”

Northern Micro’s ability to successfully procure government contracts has been another important contributor to the company’s fast growth. “We primarily sell to the federal government. That is our main customer, so we have won a number of bids that have been successful with them. We have adapted quite well to the changes in the federal government procurement process. That is the strategy that we have taken: to really closely follow our customer, understand their problem within a procurement context, and then make a strategic partnership with HPI to serve that need and requirement.”

Northern Micro’s relationship with HPI has been such a boon to both parties that HPI named the company its Partner of the Year. “Our partnership with HPI was very successful for the past year,” says Mr. Yeh. “The decision from HPI to award Northern Micro the Canadian Personal Systems Partner of the Year comes from a number of factors. Revenue growth is one of them—probably one of the main considerations. We are one of the fastest growing partners with HPI. It is significant. We used to be a gold level partner, now we are a platinum level partner. In Canada there are only a limited number; there are fewer than 10 platinum partners across the country. It is an elite group.”

Northern Micro’s partnerships also include Ottawa 2017. The company is the Official Information Technology Partner to the organization. Ottawa 2017 is in charge of organizing a year of events and attractions throughout the city to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Canada’s Confederation. “They approached us because they needed some IT [and] some devices,” Mr. Yeh remembers. “They are a not for profit organization funded by



donors and sponsors [so] we have provided all of the devices that they use as well as some software. We chose to partner with Ottawa 2017 because Northern Micro is a locally based company in Ottawa and we wanted to support these sorts of local community initiatives. Ottawa 2017 is important as part of the identity of Ottawa and Northern Micro wants to contribute to that identity. We feel that we have a role to play in that and we want to continue to support the community that we live in and work in."

Mr. Yeh sees two major challenges in the field of IT—both of which Northern Micro is adept at overcoming. "One of them is a massive shortage of skilled talent. In our industry there is huge demand for architects and engineers and there is a big shortage of these types of people. They are just not available in the marketplace, so they demand a high salary. That puts pressure on being price competitive. Retaining staff is a challenge—it is a war for talent." Northern Micro has managed to keep its in-demand workers happy to ensure that they stay on board. "We have been quite successful. Our company has a very low turnover rate. The average tenure of service with us is 12.5 years, which is pretty unique in the industry; turnover of about four or five years is average."

Another significant industry challenge is the shift toward cloud computing. "Businesses need to navigate that new paradigm

shift of publicly hosted cloud services," Mr. Yeh explains. "Previously, if an organization were to implement an application, they would generally have to purchase a server and a data center to support that application and it would be hosted on premise at their location or distributed at various locations that they own. That is now shifting toward publicly hosted data centers... That is a challenge facing this industry from a hardware architecture point of view. There are new challenges that come with this shift – maintenance, speed of delivery, data sovereignty, security, and many others."

Navigating major shifts is all in a day's work for Northern Micro. When it comes to technology, constant change is the name of the game. "The world of technology changes so fast that you have to really keep up with everything. Every 18 months there is a new paradigm shift. You really have to stay abreast of what is new. There is a lot happening."

Northern Micro is eager—and well prepared—to help clients navigate the constantly evolving world of technology. "We strive to be known as the trusted advisor for all of our customers," Mr. Yeh summarizes. "We want customers to trust us to evaluate and listen to their problems and then develop a solution based on the universe of available options – similar to a doctor-patient relationship." ■