

NCHICA Podcast featuring Cheryl Rodenfels of Nutanix

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You're listening to the Healthcare IT Trends Buzz presented by NCHICA. Today's episode is a member profile featuring Cheryl Rodenfels. She's the CTO of the America's Health Care Division at Nutanix.

Welcome to the Healthcare IT Trends Buzz. This podcast is a production of NCHICA, the North Carolina Healthcare Information and Communications Alliance. NCHICA is a nonprofit consortium dedicated to accelerating the transformation of the U S healthcare system through the effective use of information technology, informatics and analytics. My name is Janet Kennedy and I'm also the host of the Get Social Health podcast. This episode is an NCHICA member profile featuring the Chief Technology Officer of America's Healthcare for Nutanix, Cheryl Rodenfels. Cheryl, welcome so much to the podcast.

Well, thank you very much. Glad to be here.

Now according to my notes here, aside from being a seasoned healthcare technology executive, you have worked extensively across the client, consultant and solution provider landscape. You really have had a chance to sit behind the desk in about every role possible.

Yes, that's right. Prior to joining Nutanix, I was chief technology officer at a couple of large healthcare organizations and then I had the opportunity to become the chief information officer at one also. So I had an excellent opportunity to experience growth, mergers, change in legislation, all kinds of factors that are driving our healthcare organizations today.

I'm curious about the background that you have from an educational standpoint because not that many years ago they were serious technologists who were running IT departments and now I think they key attributes have much more to do with management, with vision, with the ability to integrate with other levels of the organization.

You know, that's a really good point. I'll tell you when I mentor IT employees or colleagues or peers, one of the things I talk about when they say, Hey, I'm looking at getting a Master's degree, should I go for my MIS degree? And one of the things I found is a lot of the stuff comes and some of those degrees make them more technical, but the business is really looking for them to support the business. And in doing so you have to understand balance sheets. And you have to understand human resource law and contract law and some of these things because those are parts of your everyday job and business degrees like an MBA or hospital administrative degree, those are the kinds of things that really help you understand what's going on with the organization you support. Healthcare tends to be a calling and working in the healthcare organization or running a business, it's not always about the technology or how deep can you get into the systems. It's really about the strategy of the company, their financial picture, the legislative and governance that organizations have to abide by. So it's really being a little bit more well-balanced as opposed to just purely deeply technical.

Speaking as a marketer, it was not that long ago that technology didn't really even impact marketing that you bought through newspapers or television. It was all very creative and planned, but the most technology thing was the Excel spreadsheet for your budget. And now you cannot do marketing

without many levels of technology. A lot of which have to integrate with other systems within the organization.

Oh, I agree. And part of that is being driven by the different types of ways that people want to receive their messages. And that's what organizations have to be really sensitive. You have people that want to get things through an email, you get people that want to get it through text, others who will seek out your website and then you still have people that would like to get it in the mail, you know, through a physical letter or mailing. So organizations have to be able to cater to these various groups and a lot of it is based on their adoption of technology or their ability to respond to the message or ignore the message, if that's the case.

We hate to hear that in marketing, but yes, that is very true. Well, let's talk about Nutanix. Give me your elevator pitch. If people were just looking you up, what would you be about?

One of the things that we like to say about Nutanix and that we've been working on and if I were going to give people the quick overview, Nutanix provides a software platform that allows businesses to deliver applications from anywhere. Our web scale engineering provides infrastructure that is secure, reliable, and flexible. Businesses can run their applications seamlessly in their own private cloud or in a public cloud. Our platform becomes their data center operating system. Usually when we talk about that, customers, the things that resonate with them, especially with healthcare providers, are "Hmmm...I need secure, I need flexible, I need anywhere, and I like the idea of the private cloud because I'm not exactly sure where I'm going with the public cloud." So that's, you know, usually where I start with the elevator pitch. Then there's usually a follow up that says, "well, are you a cloud company then?"

And that's where Nutanix views the cloud as an operational model, not a destination. Each business is different. Each business has its own definition of the cloud. We provide customers with the flexibility to place their applications where it makes the most sense to them. In many cases they choose our on premise solutions. In other cases they choose our public cloud offerings. Nutanix enables businesses to run their applications seamlessly, cost-effectively, securely, and that's wherever their cloud operates.

So when you are talking to a prospective client, are you dealing primarily with your IT team or are you having to meet across all levels of the C suite?

You know, Janet, that's very interesting that you asked that. In our history, we were a technology first company and we've really evolved the technology teams really like us because hyperconverged infrastructure is relatively new in the spectrum of cloud technology or on premise cloud technology. But everybody is looking at all aspects of their digital transformation right now. And a big portion of that is cost. Being able to keep their organizations competitive and really being able to move way more quickly than their traditional IT solutions have allowed them. So we're getting a lot more traction with CEOs, COOs, chief technology officers, chief information officers, because they're looking at all aspects, especially driving efficiencies because they want to reduce their costs. They also want technology that's going to take them to the future. They don't want to spend money on things that will not be moving them forward or older technology.

What does that mean that you are in the hardware/software consulting business?

No, we actually are a software platform. We provide invisible infrastructure. We work with the organization's existing technology, whether they like HP, Dell, Cisco servers, our software rides on top of their hardware. What we allow them to do and what we help them do is figure out how to create a cloud of their own so that they can be agile. They can get the competitive solutions out because, let's say they're acquiring a doctor's office, or they're expanding their business to new imaging systems, and they have to go quickly. Or they're competing against the insurance companies who are now off opening primary care clinics. We help them move quickly with integrated solutions that allow them to meet their timelines and really roll out just as if they were buying it from a public cloud provider.

You know, we don't always use the term flexible when we talk about healthcare, but certainly what's happened in the last year or so between hurricanes and flooding and wildfires in the US and Australia, dealing with COVID-19 globally, suddenly a lot of very inflexible organizations have discovered, what am I going to do if most of my employees aren't coming into work? It's a huge question and work has to continue in some ways, so I imagine that's something that you folks are literally dealing with on a daily basis.

We are, and this is one of the things that you know, as an employee, I always dealt with this because hospitals have to be prepared for everything. We go through drills, you know, we go through active shooter drills, we go through gas leak drills, you go through a community emergency drill where, yeah, like a gas leak happened at some manufacturing plant. So you're always drilling because it's required, especially as a service provider to your community. Part of the challenge is, not everything is going to be that level of a disaster or that level of an incident, but it might be something a little more localized or it might be something that happens across your particular geography. Things that healthcare has not been particularly good about is providing modern business continuation solutions.

I think the evolution that I've seen in healthcare is the first level of business continuation is we have a downtime procedure. When your systems are down or when you can't get to something, there's a paper someplace where you follow instructions so that you write down patient information or you write down vital signs, you write down test results so that you can later input them to a system. So that was very basic. You have a downtime procedure. Well, with the introduction of electronic health record systems, all of a sudden you were able to have more online basic functions. All of the major EHR systems have a basic function that allows the registration data to be collected. So if the main system's down or if they're doing maintenance, you can still admit patients, you can still process them. And then the system will update that information as soon as it's brought back online.

So from paper to some basic business continuation, those are the things we saw. Consumers are not standing for that anymore. They want their information 24 by seven. They want their information quickly. They're able to get it from their banks. They're able to get it from online shopping. The least they could do is get it from their healthcare providers. So these are the things that are driving more business continuation, more disaster preparedness, even for things that aren't as big as a pandemic or a wildfire or a hurricane. Those are the real drivers. The consumers are driving the need for data.

You know, you serve as the CTO for America's Healthcare, but Nutanix covers a lot more ground than that. Federal, state and local government, education, financial services, retail. Have you always been in the healthcare sector and what's the difference in the type of things you need to do in healthcare that might vary from some of these other industry verticals?

I'm about split 50/50 in my career between financial services and healthcare and I did about seven years in healthcare, then I did 15 years in financial services, and then eight more years in healthcare. I do cross the boundaries there. I make a couple of comparisons with the type of things again that are driving us. If you look at financial services, a lot of things that have happened over the years are person to person payments so that instead of writing a check, you can send somebody an email to their phone number and next thing you know their bank account is credited with something from you. Every time you want to speak with a personal lender, you can sign up for time for an appointment or people will call you back when it's convenient for you. Everybody's been in that phone queue where, "Hey, if you don't want to wait, what call you back in 15 minutes, will that work for you?"

And of course it is, right? Healthcare is adjusting and they're coming around to a lot of this. Self-scheduled appointments because you know what you used to have to call somebody who would make that appointment for you. Self-scheduled appointments, appointment reminders, the ability to know what the waiting time is if you are going to have to go do a drop in at an urgent care clinic. There are a lot of things that other industries have taught us and we just kind of get a little caught up in, "Hey we're healthcare. We couldn't do it." But one of the things that we're seeing, and this is true across not only the US but other countries as well, hospital organizations are bringing in leadership, IT leadership from other industries. There's a group in Ohio that hired the chief information officer from one of the retailers and then their chief technology officer came from an insurance company, a traditional insurance company.

When I asked them why, they said our organization is really needing to focus on customer experience and that's not, you know, healthcare has been treating patients like patients, but we have to realize that patients are really customers and bringing in that kind of perspective has changed some of how IT is doing business.

I definitely sense that myself, the patient is perceived as a patient by many, but the patient perceives themselves as a buyer of healthcare. I know that healthcare is aware of this and coming to the table, whether they're doing it fast enough is another question. When we talk about Nutanix and the kind of business you're doing, is your ideal customer always a large system, a large enterprise-level company, or do you work with smaller or mid-size companies?

We work with companies of all size. Right now we have over 1,500 healthcare customers that are Nutanix customers and the customers that we love to work with is anyone that wants to allow their organization to move at the speed of the cloud and also with the ease that cloud technology provides them.

We find organizations of all size, small, medium, large, extra large. They want to modernize their infrastructure, they want to improve their application performance, they want to reduce costs of the equipment and the licensing and they really want to provide their organization with a strategic path forward. Every organization has goals like that, so we find success in all sized organizations.

And how would you suggest that people reach out to you?

We have a couple of ways and most popular of course is go to <https://nutanix.com>. We have a healthcare dropdown. When you click on it, you can fill out your information and one of our healthcare screeners will call you back and get you to the right resource. We have more than 40 teams across the

US. We have an official healthcare vertical. We have sales teams and engineering teams that are truly focused on meeting the needs of the healthcare customers.

All right. That's awesome. I thank you so much for being here, Cheryl. I always love learning about the members of NCHICA. It's an organization that is only as strong as the memberships are engaged. And I know that Nutanix and you yourself personally have been very involved in NCHICA, and we appreciate it very much.

Well, thank you very much.