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BEYOND VIRTUAL SERVERS

Where virtualization is headed
in the SMB **Page 14**

PEER GROUP 2.0

Amy Kardel (pictured) of Clever Ducks will extend her relationship with a peer and work on-site at his company

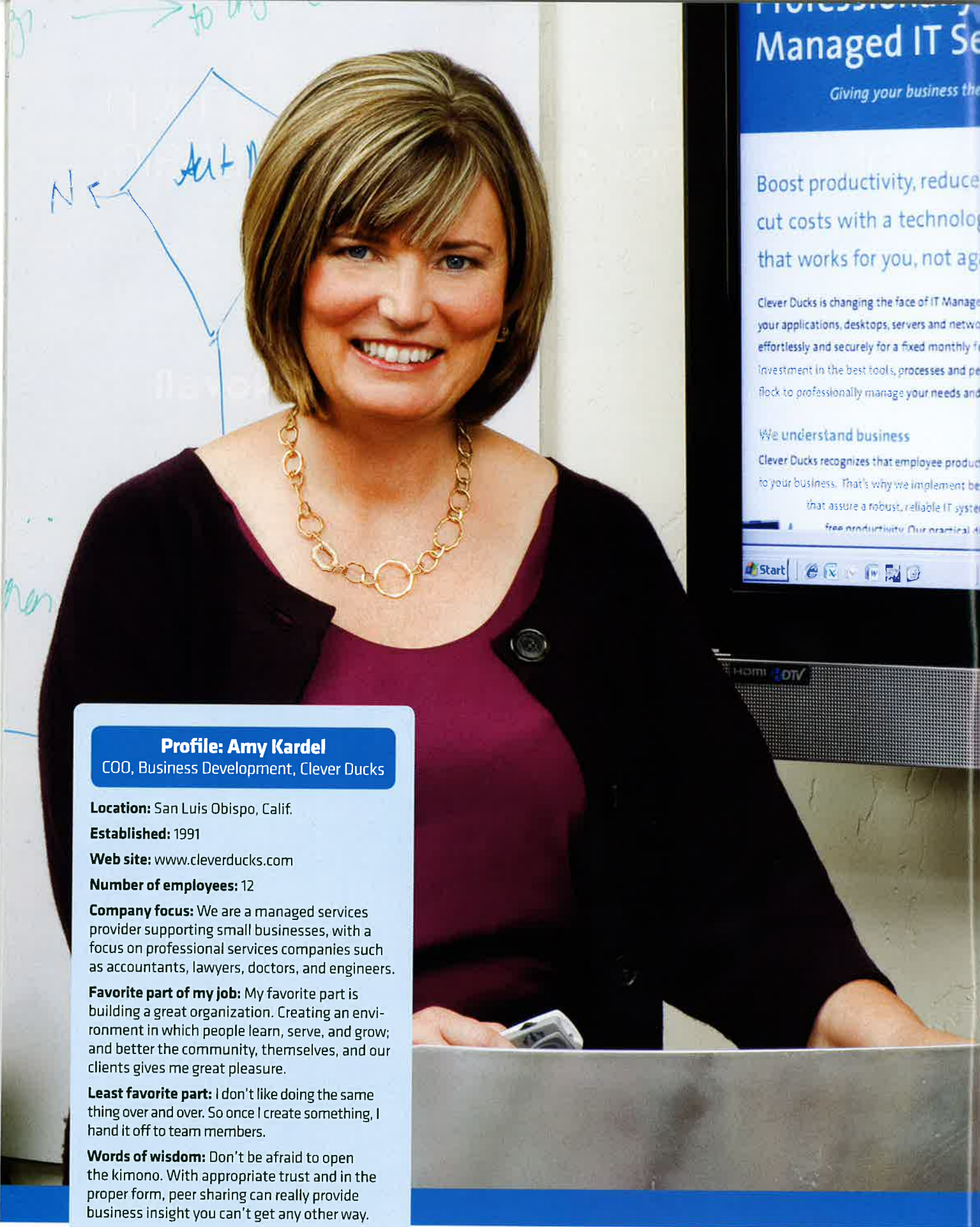


Channelpro SEPTEMBER 2009 • BEYOND VIRTUAL SERVERS SMB-Ready POS Systems / Stimulus Plan Up Close / 4 Steps to Effective MarCom

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111 Speen Street, Suite 200, Framingham, MA



Profile: Amy Kardel

COO, Business Development, Clever Ducks

Location: San Luis Obispo, Calif.

Established: 1991

Web site: www.cleverducks.com

Number of employees: 12

Company focus: We are a managed services provider supporting small businesses, with a focus on professional services companies such as accountants, lawyers, doctors, and engineers.

Favorite part of my job: My favorite part is building a great organization. Creating an environment in which people learn, serve, and grow; and better the community, themselves, and our clients gives me great pleasure.

Least favorite part: I don't like doing the same thing over and over. So once I create something, I hand it off to team members.

Words of wisdom: Don't be afraid to open the kimono. With appropriate trust and in the proper form, peer sharing can really provide business insight you can't get any other way.

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Peer Group 2.0

When you extend your peer group relationship and spend time at another solution provider's company, you improve your own business—and your colleague's as well.

By Amy Kardel • Photography by Stephen Morales

WORKING IN A PEER GROUP is a high-trust, high-return activity that enables like-minded, goal-oriented people to really mastermind how to run their businesses. You are in the trenches with the people in your group, meeting face to face each quarter and via conference calls in between, getting good, unbiased advice from solution providers dealing with the same issues and concerns.

It was through this sharing that I developed a great peer relationship with Jay Strickland, the president of WingSwept, another IT service provider based in Garner, N.C. Jay came up with the idea of on-site cross-training as the logical next step to meeting as a group. That is, someone from one company goes to another company for an extended period, and both companies benefit from this more in-depth way of learning.

THE EXCHANGE

Jay admired our marketing efforts, and saw that we had experience that we could share with one of his employees—a recent college graduate whom he hoped would become his director of marketing. At the same time, the young woman, Molly Moore, would bring her energy and enthusiasm to our business and help us push forward some new marketing initiatives.

So Molly joined us for almost three weeks. My role was to share everything we'd done in marketing and then get feedback from WingSwept via Molly, and also to focus her talents and ideas on materials and projects we hadn't had time for, such as partner programs and co-op dollars. It was great to have Molly look at things with a fresh set of eyes and help us fundamentally revamp our materials.

THE LONGER-TERM PAYOFF

The marketing transfer between Clever Ducks and WingSwept was an eye-opener for both companies. What started as a wild idea turned out to be a business plan from which we are still reaping benefits.

To achieve this, a mutual understanding between the companies is key. Jay and I not only have a trusted peer relationship, but our companies also share a similar market, core values, and offerings. Further, we are in different geographic locations—he's on the East Coast and I'm on the West—so our companies will never compete. Also important is to ensure that the visit, for lack of a better term, is long enough for the visitor to become acclimated and get ideas flowing. In our case, almost three weeks was just right.

“TO BE IN THE KITCHEN WITH THE CHEF IS THE BEST WAY TO LEARN AND SHARE IDEAS ABOUT THE RECIPE.”

AMY KARDEL, COO, CLEVER DUCKS

Any company in any industry can conduct a similar exchange, and at any level within the organization. All you need is to be open to learning and experiencing things in a new atmosphere. The people involved don't need to be new to the company either—a fresh perspective from a person in a similar position and company may be just what an experienced employee or executive needs to improve the way he or she does business.

It really was an amazing experience for everyone involved, and the kind of training that just cannot be duplicated within your

own organization. The venture strengthened our business relationship with WingSwept and opened doors for us to continue to collaborate in the future.

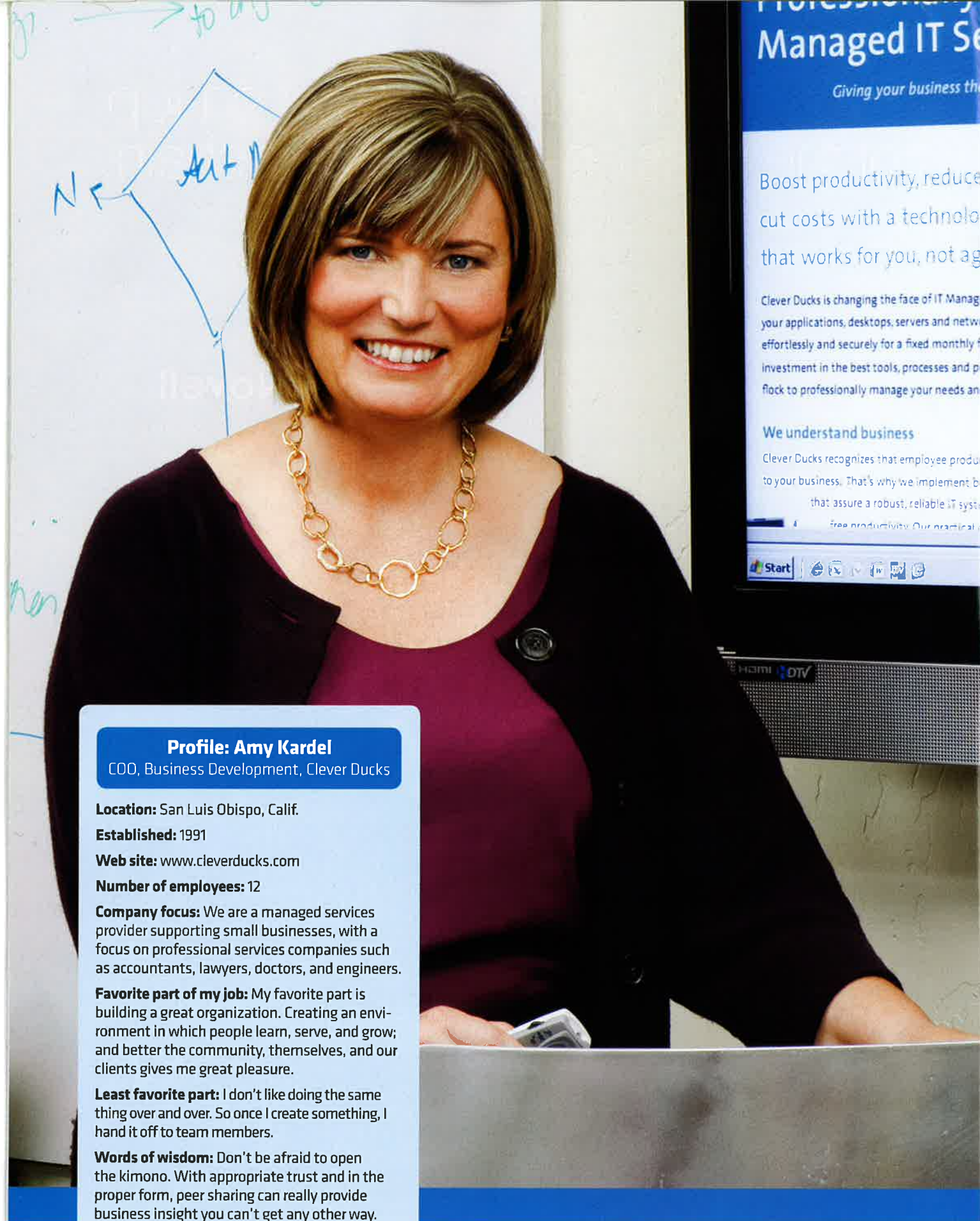
WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

We can now use our experience to discuss operational and service-related workflow issues, for example, which is different than talking about them in theory at a peer group meeting or at a consulting session. To be in the kitchen with the chef is the best way to learn and share ideas about the recipe.

From my point of view, there are three benefits to having someone from a similar company share with you in this way. First, two heads are always better than one, especially having another person in the same field

to use as a sounding board. The second benefit is saving time—why reinvent the wheel? And the last and most important benefit is learning to change and improve the way you do business to keep pace with change in the world. It also enables you to leverage a good relationship and avoid being isolated.

Because the marketplace is always changing, and what resonates with clients and potential clients changes as well, I am now planning a trip to the WingSwept offices so that Molly and I can further our discussions and work on some new ideas.



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