

# A Partner Conversation with Michael Strong, Chief Operating Officer at Blue Layer IT



Success with RingCentral isn't just reserved for those channel partners that are headquartered in your traditional major metropolitan areas. Day in, day out, Blue Layer IT proves that when it comes to building an exceptional book of business, the skill of the partner is far more important than the zip code in which the company operates. Michael Strong, the COO of Blue Layer IT, was kind enough to sit down with us to shed some light on how they do it.

## INTERVIEWER:

*Blue Layer IT is one of RingCentral's more successful partners, regardless of size. How do you keep reeling in these big deals?*

## MICHAEL STRONG:

[Laughs] That's the million-dollar question, right?

Look, we've always operated with a right-sized consulting mantra in that it never made sense to use a sledgehammer to drive in a nail. We never go to clients and tell them that they have to use these specific products to do business with us. We make suggestions. We're transparent. We keep things simple. We don't gold plate things that don't need to be gold plated.

People are already hiring us because they don't particularly understand everything that goes into communications technology anymore. Phones aren't just about telephones these days; they're about software, video, networking, bandwidth, and all these other moving parts.

It's easy for the technology to quickly overwhelm a client. If you as the partner get too complex, you lose the customer. At the end of the day, we just try to have an honest conversation about how we can

help, what the client's pain points are, and go from there.

Keep it simple. Deploy it right the first time. Support it for a long time. Make measurable improvements along the way. Do that, and everybody's happy.

## INTERVIEWER:

*What about selling RingCentral specifically? Could you provide us with some insight into that?*

## MICHAEL STRONG:

With RingCentral, we avoid having conversations about dial tones with clients. Instead, we focus on communications, compliance, security, collaboration, functionality, teams, and mobility.

We compare RingCentral to Legos for your business. You can start small and snap-on pieces later. If a client wants to dip their toes in the water and start with RingCentral Meetings, they can. They can see how it works—see how they like it—then graduate to the phone system. If they want to start with the phone system and later graduate to the contact center, they can do that too.

We say it's a solution for anybody. Whether you're a two-person retail shop, a boutique of some sort, or a multi-branch bank with all sorts of technical issues, it'll work for you. It gives the same two-person shop the same bells and whistles as the 300-person shop.

I can get an executive that doesn't know anything about IT, I can get him to understand that the money he spends on RingCentral today is going to work for him a year from now, that it's not going to have to be replaced or ripped out, that if he wants to add on, bolt on, or whatever, we can get another piece and snap it onto what he already has.

## Company profile

Blue Layer IT's mission is to make sure a business functions at its highest potential through providing quality IT resources. They offer solutions including fully managed 24/7 IT support, unified communications, disaster recovery, cyber security and security awareness training.

## Website

[bluelayer.com](http://bluelayer.com)

## Headquarters

Lubbock, TX

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—Michael Strong,  
COO of Blue Layer IT

The money the customer spends today needs to keep working for that customer two years from now. You don't ever want to have that conversation where you have to call up a customer and say, "Hey, remember that great thing I sold you two years ago? Yeah, now we're going to have to rip that thing out and put this other thing in because it's obsolete."

With RingCentral, you don't have to worry about having those conversations. That's why it's the only phone option we offer. That's why we use RingCentral in our own business.

**INTERVIEWER:**

*You've had a lot of success with Contact Center, could you also tell us a bit about that?*

**MICHAEL STRONG:**

From the contact center side, those conversations take longer. There are a lot more moving parts. You really have to get more buy-in from more people in the organization about how it will impact other aspects of the organization.

The last RingCentral Contact Center deal we did, we had one system playing the role of the phones and another playing the role of contact center. We introduced RingCentral as an option that would eliminate those two separate systems and combine into one platform.

**INTERVIEWER:**

*What convinced you to partner with RingCentral in the first place?*

**MICHAEL STRONG:**

Like any IT company, we have tiers of support and engineering, but I wanted everyone in our organization to be capable of supporting the unified communications platform.

We didn't want to be heavily focused on managing on-prem communications, with a lot more engineers on the ground. You need engineers physically at the customer's site to manage the phone systems, implement configurations, et cetera.

For our operation, that just didn't work. We couldn't care for all of our clients in other aspects of the business if we had all of our super technical people sitting in a call center answering questions.

Instead, we needed something cloud-managed, so that when a client called us, my frontline help desk could offer the same level of support that my engineers could. That way, my hyper-technical engineers could be freed up to focus on actual engineering things.

So yeah, I think a big part of why we partnered with RingCentral was trying to level set customer expectations with my help desk.

That's probably not your typical response, but it's true.

**INTERVIEWER:**

*What would you say is the best part about partnering with RingCentral?*

**MICHAEL STRONG:**

I have to give you credit: RingCentral treats partners well regardless of size.

Your folks are always willing to get on a plane and come out to meet a client to give them the rah-rah-rah.

I mean, we're in West Texas, Lubbock—350 miles west of Dallas. There are plenty of states where you could drive 350 miles and go from one side to the other. Texas is not one of them. In terms of markets, Lubbock's population is about 300,000 people. We're not really talking about opportunities for 10,000 seats in our market.

And yet, one of our more recent deals—north of 300 seats—RingCentral flew in three or four people to help. We might be in West Texas, but RingCentral treats me like I'm in a metropolitan market. You give us the same TLC as someone 10 times our size.

That goes a long way in helping to win clients — when a vendor will actually sit down and show the client that they're real people. That matters.