Laserfiche’s Chris Wacker: ‘We Are Good At What We Do’

CEO Chris Wacker said this looks like a good year for Laserfiche, the Long Beach-based company that devises and distributes enterprise content management software worldwide. Wacker said it like someone who says it a lot. And, in fact, he has tended to repeat that “good year” thing at least once a year, generally at this time of year, for almost a quarter-century.

“We’ve been profitable for the past 22 years in a row,” Wacker acknowledged in a flat, matter-of-fact tone of voice that nonetheless managed to convey pride and humility. “It looks bright for 2015, too, and it seems we will be continuing the growth we’ve experienced over the past 10 to 12 years.”

Why?

“Two factors,” Wacker said. “The economy is picking up, and our approach is very disciplined.”

Speaking of discipline, Wacker chose not to translate into numbers such terms as a “bright” year or “profitable” or “growth.” Laserfiche is a privately held company, so he doesn’t have to, although Wacker declined the request gently and almost apologetically.

“This industry is very competitive,” he explained, “and we are in the crosshairs of a lot of companies.”

It only takes a few minutes around Laserfiche — whether on the website or on the phone with the CEO — to realize it is an unusual company, one that pioneers the outer limits of information technology, yet remains firmly rooted to business values and practices so traditional that some might dismiss them as obsolete.

Among those values is self-reliance, which in the case of Laserfiche means developing and expanding its software products through its own innovation, rather than by the acquisition of other companies.

“Nien-Ling kind of established our culture many, many years ago,” said Wacker, speaking of his late wife, and Laserfiche’s founder, whose death last autumn after a long illness prompted his ascent to CEO from executive vice president and the promotion of Karl Chan to company president. “Nien-Ling believed that money was a reward for doing things well, rather than an objective in itself. That’s no longer in vogue, I don’t think, but it works very well for us.”

Wacker boiled that down to two factors, too.

“We are good at what we do — I am in awe of the people in our development and engineering departments,” he said, “and our team is just hell bent on customer satisfaction.”

Laserfiche employs about 350 people — approximately 250 of them at the company’s headquarters on Long Beach Boulevard. Although its vendors and its technology are all over the world, Laserfiche considers Long Beach its home.

“We have to have a headquarters, a place where people meet, talk and exchange ideas,” Wacker said. “We have a few field offices and people working remotely, but the majority of folks are right here in Long Beach. They come in here every day and work efficiently — more than if they were to work remotely, when there would be long lags between conferences and conversations.

All that said, especially the part about Laserfiche’s 22-year streak of profitability, it probably ought to be noted that the company was founded in 1987 — 28 years ago. That is, Laserfiche hasn’t finished in the black every year. What was going on way back then?

Wacker isn’t offended by the question.

“We got caught up in the dot-com phase and the venture capital chasing of the late 1980s and very early 1990s. We thought if we raised capital we could accelerate our growth,” he acknowledged. “But it just distracted us from our mission. We lost focus. We couldn’t focus, I guess. But when we put that aside and developed the single-minded focus on doing things well, we became profitable and have remained so ever since.”