

Meet Aaron Wilkins, Senior Vice President at Human-I-T

Jim Ries: [00:00:00] Hello and welcome to Java with Jim. I'm Jim Ries, Director of Business Development at Offit Kurman. Join here today with Aaron Wilkins, CFO at Human-I-T. Aaron, how are you today?

Aaron Wilkins: I'm doing really well Jim. Thanks for having me. I appreciate it.

Jim Ries: Good. Yeah, thanks for joining us. Aaron, tell us about Human-I-T certainly an interesting name. What do you do there and what makes your company different from other companies in your industry?

Aaron Wilkins: Yeah, thanks for the question. I'm the CFO at Human-I-T.

I oversee a couple of different departments here. That's accounting, finance, legal and compliance. And so that's what currently rolls up to me. Over the years I've had touched several different groups. I've been managing the HR team, a couple times before we handed that off to our HR leaders and done a lot of the backend building and work here at Human-I-T.

I've seen us and stewarded us through two employees with \$4,000 in revenue in 2012 to, becoming a \$30 [00:01:00] million company here in 2025 with about 175 employees and contractors. So massive growth. We've been in business for 12 years. Talk a little bit about what makes this different.

What makes the company different? We sit in the middle of two industries. We're trying to solve a problem with two separate problems and in different industries. One problem is that there's e-waste that's thrown away every day. Another problem is there's a number of people throughout the US and across the globe that do not have access to an affordable device or what we like to call digital equity, the pillars of digital equity. To get into what we do we focus on retrieving devices through the IAD piece, which is the e-waste piece. And we work with a lot of Fortune 2000 companies to ensure that they feel comfortable donating devices to us and we wipe them and make sure that we provide data security and all sorts of reporting, very detailed reporting from an asset management standpoint to get them properly disposed of through their end of life. We do that three ways. Instead [00:02:00] of a normal recycler, so this is what makes us a little bit different.

We don't just burn out devices and then use the commodities to make a living. We use that as a last resort. We focus on reuse and we send them through several channels to make sure that we can make an environmental impact and a social impact. We send them through first our programmatic channels.

That's sending devices downstream to individuals in need. Like I mentioned earlier, we will resell any sort of outlier, b2B electronics that we see in a corporate environment, like a server, a switch, or a printer, what have you, that's not going to go to a family in need. And then we have wholesale channels and e-commerce channels that we do offer devices if they're not running through our programs to make sure that we're turning and burning and keeping things out of the landfills. Last resort, like I mentioned, is sending things downstream to R2 and e-stewards, certified recyclers. Those are important, certifications in our industry. That programmatic

channel that I mentioned earlier, that device will jumpstart the digital equity process, which is the [00:03:00] second industry that we're in.

And so we have a social component to what we do from an e-waste management standpoint. Instead of how most recyclers do not, the device is the first leg of the stool. The second is low cost internet. The third is technical support if they need, to troubleshoot something that's happening with their device.

And the fourth is digital literacy. And so that's a big area where we're leaning into recently. We built our own modules in 2020 and we've improved those over time and we're now starting to offer basic AI training. So think of it as trying to get people to a standard benchmark to be able to operate in an environment like this where they can go work, go to school, apply for jobs, stay connected with their community, and know how to properly do that as a digital citizen and not, partake in things that will lead down a path that they shouldn't. So clicking on spam, having a phishing email come through and clicking on that and then having to deal with all the implications of those downstream effects.

We try to bring people up to that benchmark. Effectively, we take devices in, we repurpose them, and then we [00:04:00] jumpstart the process to do those four things that I just mentioned.

Jim Ries: It's the gift that keeps on giving almost. Aaron, you mentioned devices many times in your explanation and for the listening audience, can you describe what those devices are in layman terminology, not getting too technical, just give us an idea of what some of those devices are.

Aaron Wilkins: Yeah, absolutely. When it comes to the programmatic element of that, we're sending laptops and tablets downstream for the most part. We're trying to make sure that people, like I said, can be brought up to that benchmark and, use a device for a application to college.

Use the device for their homework in the home. Because we often find that families may have one device or no device at all and are going to a library. And so we're trying to give those families their time back to make sure that they are not spinning their wheels, driving all over town to get internet or driving all over town to use a device at a library.

When in theory these are becoming [00:05:00] basic rights that we should be thinking about as like utilities almost. Is similarly to electricity and water and things like that. You cannot operate in today's society without a device and internet. So those are the things we're sending downstream.

In terms of what we're also repurposing, like I said before, servers, switches, printers. Any kind of audio video, like equipment. The only thing that we don't take in and we like to say we take everything with a plug with the exception of kitchen appliances basically. And larger, home appliances and that sort of thing.

Jim Ries: Got it. So Aaron, when it comes to Human-I-T, what are you most proud of?

Aaron Wilkins: Oh man, that's a good question. There's a lot to be proud of. I've been here for 12 years now, 13 years in October. And I would say the impact still is what I'm most proud of.

So as of today, I'm proud and happy to report that we've given away 523,000 devices distributed through our recipients and families free of charge. And that's a phenomenal statistic to point to. It's the largest one that we're the most proud of. We've assisted [00:06:00] 110,000 households with access to affordable internet.

We have 11,500 learners that have used our digital literacy platform in the last five years, and that's growing drastically. We've seen about 2,800 people sign up for our ai course in the last two months and we just released it. A lot more to come there. 35,000 technical support tickets resolved across the us. A big chunk of that, during the pandemic we assisted a couple school districts with their technical support because they were struggling. And then another one that I'm most proud of, I'm a big environmental buff, 15.1 million pounds of E-waste diverted from landfills through partnerships with, major fortune 500 companies out there. And I can't obviously say all their names on an external facing call like this. But just know that they are Fortune, 100 and 200 companies that are making the biggest dent there. That's what I'm most proud of. We've done a lot and I've personally done a lot here, but continuing to see that impact and those numbers are important, but I think what's even more important is to take it a step further and more granularly is actually seeing the [00:07:00] stories now. Our marketing team has done an amazing job at like really capturing the individual stories of what's happening out there and who's getting a device from us and what it's going to help them do. And then lastly I would say, we just did a programmatic evaluation of all of our programs and the work that we've done over the last five years with a company, called 60 Decibels.

We learned everything that we thought. We're helping seniors, we're helping, young families with a couple of kids in the household and, primarily skewing towards young mothers and their kids. And it makes me so proud that's the groups that we're helping that are in the most need of the services that we provide.

Jim Ries: Lot to be proud of. Aaron, what are the next six months look like for you and Human-I-T. And I gather you might have some other news that you'd like to share with us.

Aaron Wilkins: Yeah. I think the next six months for Human-I-T we are in the process this year of achieving a key result for ourselves that we've never achieved in a single year.

That's reaching 35,000 plus people served by the end [00:08:00] of the year. That's an increase in ROIA different ROI than we normally talk about return on impact. That's a year over year, 20% increase in people served at Human-I-T through all of our programs. And so I'm super proud of that.

I'm super proud to see that come to fruition and for us to be able to achieve that milestone. It's just another feather in our cap to say we're continuing to make sure that we're focusing on serving more and more people every year and going deeper and saying, what do you actually need?

Not just a Turkey giveaway by showing up and giving away a device, but making sure that we're giving those wraparound services to the community and making them feel like we're part of the equations for solving the problem of getting them to that benchmark that everybody else is at.

Jim Ries: Got it. All right. Last question. What do most people watching this video not know about you?

Aaron Wilkins: Yeah, so breaking this live I'm proud of everything that I've done at Human-I-T and obviously super excited about the work that we're doing, but I'm actually personally going to be transitioning and the next three to [00:09:00] six months out of Human-I-T and starting a new venture just to make sure that I'm continuing to focus on solving problems that I'm seeing in society.

It's a big important, principle of mine. And from a value standpoint I want to take everything that I've done at Human-I-T and everything I've learned, out in the community and now help solve some of the problems that we're seeing in the housing market. I'm happy to report that I'm going to be starting a startup called Move Wise.

And Move Wise is going to be a platform to help solve the home buying process and make that more transparent, easy and affordable for people that are, trying to buy their first home. And we're going to try to make sure that we're focusing on a B2C approach to that, but also trying to bring partners to the table throughout that process, like lenders, real estate agents the Zillows of the world, to try to make one place where people can go to go end to end with the process. Because right now it's such a fragmented industry and it's, and there is areas to, increase affordability, increase transparency, shorten the time that it takes, and not [00:10:00] make it such a arduous thing, to go through when people are trying to buy a home.

Jim Ries: Home buying is anything but transparent and easy. Can't talk about the affordability part. Not a whole lot you and I can do about that, but transparency and ease for sure. That's fabulous. Aaron, really appreciate you spending time with us today and hope to see you soon.

Aaron Wilkins: Yeah, thanks Jim.

Appreciate it.

Jim Ries: All righty. Thank you.