Welcome back to Camp Content, where we explore content creation and revenue growth. Today, we feature Steven Thomas, Chief Revenue Officer at Asigra, who brings over 25 years of experience in enterprise SaaS, cybersecurity, and data protection. Host Molly Ruland will discuss Stephen's career across companies like Risk Optics and Symantec, and his role at Asigra in Toronto with their SaaS Assure platform. Tune in to learn how Steven uses AI in sales, builds client relationships, and the leadership lessons he values

Connect with Stephen: https://www.linkedin.com/in/stephenthomascissp/

Website: https://www.saasassure.com/

Episode Timestamps:

00:00 - Intro

00:29 - Boosting Data Backup Partnerships with Midsize MSPs

05:34 - Navigating Email Marketing Amid Tech Giant Updates

07:03 - Supercharging Engagement Through LinkedIn and Events

11:46 - Pinpointing and Engaging MSP Target Clients

14:53 - Crafting Winning SaaS Strategies for MSPs

17:47 - Streamlining Payments and Fostering Community Growth

20:44 - A Leadership Approach by John Elled

23:28 - Navigating Product Development for Startups

25:17 - Embracing the Impact of Authentic, Imperfect Writing

26:47 - Escaping AI Constraints for Creative Freedom

27:55 - Outro

Quote of the Episode: "Focus on knowing your ideal customer. For us, it's managed service providers targeting specific clients."— Stephen Thomas

---

For more insights and to book a call with Molly Ruland, visit Molly's Calendly.

Host: Molly Ruland, CEO & Founder
Operations Manager: Matt Billman
Powered by: Heartcast Media,http://www.heartcastmedia.com

Transcript:

Molly Ruland:
Okay. Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Camp Content. I podcast focusing on content and revenue in 2024. Today, our guest is Steve Steven Thomas, the accomplished chief revenue officer. Oh, I should ask. Is it a SIGRA?

Stephen Thomas:
It's a SIGRA.

Molly Ruland:
A SIGRA. Okay. I should have known that's got a little Latin flair to it. Okay. Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to camp content, a podcast focusing on content and revenue in 2024. Our guest today is Steven Thomas, the accomplished Chief Revenue Officer at Asigra. With over 25 years of expertise in enterprise SaaS across cybersecurity, data protection, and ITRM, Steven's strategic vision and leadership have shaped sales teams at various tech giants, driving growth and market penetration in the industry. Steven's journey

Stephen Thomas:
includes pivotal the sweetest thing that anyone's ever said about me. I don't

Molly Ruland:
Hey, man. Well, I'm sticking to it. That's my story. I'm sticking to it. Steven's journey includes pivotal roles at Risk Optics, Arcserve, Armor, Cyberbit, and Symantec, solidifying his reputation as a transformative force in the tech landscape. Notably, his significant achievements at Cyberbit where he catalyzed the American market business growth from inception to 12,000,000. This underscores his prowess in crafting effective go to market plans and delivering exceptional cybersecurity solutions. So without further ado, welcome to the show, mister Steven Thomas.

Molly Ruland:
I'm good. I'm good. I'm excited to chat with you because we have a lot in common. We got a lot of love for the same stuff and I didn't know that going into this so I'm even more

excited. So thanks for coming on the show today and taking time to hang out with me. Can you give me a little

Stephen Thomas:
a bit of interest: Keep it interesting for your crew today. How about that?

Molly Ruland:
Well, we'll do our best. We'll do a little stand up, maybe a little improv at the end, just to make sure. I would love to get a little snapshot of your current business, you know, how many employees, where are you guys located, where are your clients, you know, that kind of stuff.

Stephen Thomas:
You bet. So, Segura is based out of Toronto. So we're headquartered out of Toronto. We've got about 130 folks. We're kind of a startup within a startup. So the executive team that was brought to Segura that's running the organization now was brought here really over the last 2 years to launch a new platform that's called SaaS Assure. So that's really kind of the reformation of the company. We have a legacy data protection business that is fantastic with great partners.

Stephen Thomas:
We've got about 500 partners globally. And our go to market is largely through the managed service provider community. So that's our focus from a go to market perspective.

Molly Ruland:
That's about 130 people. That's impressive. And what kind of companies are you working with? Large companies, midsize companies? Who's your what is your client base looking for? Yeah.

Stephen Thomas:
We generally work with your midsize managed service providers. So folks like Corporate Technologies, Longview Systems, Cyber Fortress out of San Antonio. So those are kind of our typical day to day partners. We've got relationships with some of the larger bars out there, the traditional bars that are becoming MSPs, like your Guide Points and Optives as well. But our traditional go to market is we sell our platform to managed service providers that then deliver a data protection or backup service to their end customer clients.

Molly Ruland:

Interesting. So how do you get in front of these types of clients? Is this part of an arm of some of the investing that you're doing? I mean, how do you find these large clients?

Stephen Thomas:
No. You've got so you think most of our partners or MSP partners are part of the MSP community. So if you so, Molly, you may not be familiar, but if you're kind of you, your listeners are familiar with IT sales as you think about small, medium business and maybe who takes care, Molly, of your IT services for you. Maybe it's the purple guys out of Louisiana or somebody. Right? But oftentimes, it's a small organization called the managed service provider that's doing the day to day kind of break fix for you. And so we tend to work with the larger versions of those partners. And there's a bunch of great communities out there. Our CMO is Janine Edwards, who came to us from ConnectWise, where she ran something called IT Nation for them, which is a really, really large MSP community.

Stephen Thomas:
And that's, again, probably a good example of where we go and engage with those partners to talk about our offering and capabilities.

Molly Ruland:
Have you managed other sales teams before outside of this industry, or have you always been in this world?

Stephen Thomas:
I hate to say I've kind of always been in technology. You know, from a management, sales and marketing management perspective. Now I have had my eyes opened over the last 5 years. I've done work. I think I mentioned it to you. I've done work with some accelerators, and do some mentoring for seed and pre seed companies. It's been a absolute ton of fun and kinda keeps the the knife edge sharp, if you will, because you realize how, you know, people are doing things differently that traditionally, you know, you've gone to market in one way or the other, but you get to learn something new every day, kind of when you're talking to young folks who are building companies from the ground

Molly Ruland:
up. Yeah. Have you seen some of your strategies change over the years? Like, are you really impacted by AI, or is it kind of business as usual over and over at the home front there?

Stephen Thomas:

So let's say I hate to say I'm gonna mark the date, but this is, like, August of 24. And the thing that all of your listeners that are dealing with email marketing right now that have probably experienced are the recent changes related to Google, you know, Microsoft's email services. Like, if we think about the classic demand generation component of sales with your outbound BDR teams, that's the piece that over the last, I would say, 4 years since COVID is just fundamentally transformed where everybody looks, smells, feels like I don't wanna say we've we've a little bit maybe ruined email as a vehicle to engage new prospects. But in some ways, it feels like we have because the, you know, the amount of messaging that your CIOs, you know, your CEOs, your c level suite folks are getting is just so intense that, you know, they can't really get through it. And these recent changes from, you know, Google and Microsoft with regards to email marketing have really made it difficult to deliver a message to one of those mailboxes without having some prior engagement with that particular email box. So that's something just kind of very tactical that's really transformed over the last, I think, you know, 3 3 years or so.

Molly Ruland:
Is that your primary source of lead generation? Is that email, outbound email?

Stephen Thomas:
No. It's just one of those really interesting pieces that's, you know, if you talk about things that have changed dramatically, that's obviously one of them. Our main sources, frankly, we have an outbound BDR organization that leverages LinkedIn very, very effectively. Like, that to us is a kind of a cooler place that we go and drive our business. The other is still we've got a preponderance of dependence upon events. So there, again, the managed service provider and partner communities are still very, you know, active. They still are getting out to core events that we can engage them in. And so that's a place that we continue to go to and invest in, our quality events where we know our partners, you know, and new partners are going to be where we can get our message directly to those partners.

Stephen Thomas:
And just a sidebar here, Molly, something that I see with younger companies and even mid tier companies are participating in these events without a speaking slot. And I would just say, if you're not talking to the audience for 5 or 10 minutes, event participation just really isn't worth it. Then people passing by a booth, you know, aren't successful for us. We really need to have that speaking slot where we can tell our story.

Molly Ruland:

Yeah. I feel that. I only go to podcast conventions that I can get a speaking opportunity at because, you know, it's really just for marketing and getting in front of people. Yeah. But, you know, we don't we don't work with a lot of podcasters. We look to work with businesses more. So, like, podcast convention isn't necessarily the best place for us, but that speaking slot is always a good one no matter what. So, that's interesting.

Molly Ruland:
Do you find, I I noticed that you have a podcast. So is that a business driver, like, a business development driver or lead generation driver for you as well?

Stephen Thomas:
It is just like you're doing it right. I mean, content creation is really what it's all about. So, we've got a podcast that we've just launched called SaaS Anything. It's just it's oriented against the SaaS landscape, which is a place where we participate, and it gives us the chance to go hear other people's stories and create content with partners. And it's just an easy place to give us those little snippets of content that drag people in via LinkedIn, you know, get them engaged, demonstrate thought leadership, all the things that I think probably you do as well here.

Molly Ruland:
For sure. Well, you know, and our focus is, you know, interviewing people that we might wanna do business with or form strategic relationships with because I'm convinced that relationships are really what's gonna drive. I mean, I think relationships are what's always driven business, but especially in this new era of tech and volume and sending 1,000 messages a day. Like, at the end of the day, there's a handful of people that I could name right now who have driven so many clients to me and so many referrals and Shelby Scarborough is one of them, like, you know, that one person has given me so much business and that was a relationship that was formed and it really had nothing to do with volume, right, and and high numbers. It's about connecting as people.

Stephen Thomas:
That that's that's exactly, you know, when I was talking about the email piece, kinda you were talking about AI, the automation associated with being able to, deliver a pretty highly personalized, you know, email or sequence targeting, you know, executive a, b, or c has become frankly so easy that Right. It's difficult to break through that noise. And the other piece, frankly, is if you look at the content that's written these days, I think that's another area, particularly on LinkedIn, where AI is really beginning to be abused in the vein of basically republishing someone else's story as your own. And it just becomes, again, a lot of noise. And so relationships are kind of fundamental to how you

break through and are able to get access to the people that you wanna talk to in the industry.

Molly Ruland:
You know, this, I love the SaaS Me Anything podcast name, by the way. It's brilliant. It's so it's so sassy, if you will, but not to double pun it. But, it's brilliant. I love it. So there's a lot of SaaS companies out there. In fact, I just came up with a tech idea and I think we're gonna end up being a SaaS company and I never envisioned myself as a tech bro, but here we are, Steven. You know what I mean? Like, what is life? How are you cutting through the there's a lot of noise in that industry right now.

Molly Ruland:
There's a lot of companies and a lot of pitches and a lot of great ideas, but not all of them make it. So how are you navigating? That's a very noisy space. How are you managing all of that?

Stephen Thomas:
Yeah. So for us, I think if you know, as anyone these days, it's about focus and understanding kind of who your ideal customer profile is. And for us, as I mentioned earlier, that's managed service providers, and it's managed service providers that serve a particular type of client. So really being crisp and distilling that down to a really core subset of partners that we wanna go spend a lot of time, energy, and money on. That's exactly what we're doing right now. So that's how we've kinda tried or worked to break through, is being focused, going to the watering holes that those partners are going to and being active in their communities. You know, so for example, we were just out. CompTIA is a technical educational organization here that delivers a lot of great content, a lot of great training.

Stephen Thomas:
But going out to say, CompTIA, ChannelCon, where you know your partners are gonna be participating in those events, leading thought leadership sessions around data protection and SaaS, right, where we want people to be thinking about compliance and the risk of SaaS data. So for that, that's how we're really getting into those ecosystems and making sure our message is heard. And I know you've I just realized the audio for a second. So, I have a strong appreciation for 2 large English labs that are outside of the office right now. Very excited to come in and Yes. I'm sure to talk to you as well.

Molly Ruland:
They're the worst. I tell you, they're very quiet until there's an important recording going on. So usually, I mute myself and I yell behind my hand, Shut up. Shut up, so people

don't see me, but it doesn't always work the way that I wanted to. Yeah. So let's see. I've got some other questions here. Let me pull these up here.

Molly Ruland:
So how are you prioritizing these revenue drivers in this space, you know, what are you, what are you doing to capitalize on these and employ these strategies with the companies you're working with now? It's

Stephen Thomas:
a broad question. What we really try and focus on is, this is kind of the value for your customer, and that's what we do. So in our case, and I think everybody needs to find that story that anchors their value to their customers. So for us, again, our customers are generally managed service providers that are delivering a data protection service to their end clients. And so what we talk to them about is they've got a journey going on right now with their end customers, where applications and, you know, we were talking about this a little bit earlier, where applications are beginning or for the most part, have already migrated to SaaS. So about 85% of applications have migrated from on premise to SaaS. But for those managed service providers, they used to take care of the servers that were on-site and the PCs that were on-site and all of the applications. But as that moves to SaaS, a lot of those relationships with that end customer become direct.

Stephen Thomas:
And so really, one of our core value pitches is Mr. And Mrs. Managed Service Provider. You need to go have that relevant conversation with your existing customers about what's their SaaS strategy, what SaaS applications that they deploy, and are you participating in the management of those SaaS applications? So for us, that's kind of that educational, hey, you need to be taking care of this part of your customer's business, and we're part of that story, right? So if you get engaged and you go take care of that part of their business, then we can help you monetize or create value and de-risk your customer's environment. So again, it's like I'm teaching you, Mr. And Mrs. Customer, my managed service provider customer, how to go derisk your end customer's environment, so the people that you serve, while creating more value and revenue for yourself. So again, it's there's no other easy way to say you've got to really find that specific message that delivers kind of, you know, you hate to say ROI, but delivers some return for your end customer that's compelling for them.

Stephen Thomas:
And if you can't do that, then you know, maybe you have to take a step back and rethink your messaging. Right?

Molly Ruland:
For sure. I mean, well, and I would imagine that companies, they hit a certain point, and then they know they need you, but you need to be in their ear before they realize they need you. So when they know they need you, they think of you first. Right? So,

Stephen Thomas:
Well, in that way, I feel like the market today, Molly, is people don't wanna hear a straight up product pitch. Right? It's you've gotta kinda you you've gotta teach them how to go win in the market. And if they win with you, awesome. Right? But again, that's part of the storyboard is kind of making sure that they understand why they're doing this part of the work and why it's going to create value for their business. And if we do that well, then great. If you use our platform, fantastic. Right? That's what we want. But again, that's how we've transitioned from trying to tell a product story to telling a very customer facing story, in our case, you know, managed service provider facing story.

Stephen Thomas:
Yeah.

Molly Ruland:
I mean, I would imagine that even a lot of these, you know, SaaS company founders probably get thrown into these situations too, right? Like, they have a good idea, they get started, give them some money and now all of a sudden they're wearing all these hats they they've never worn before and thinking about things they've never thought before like customer data and all, you know, all of that where, you know, when you're a visionary, you're not you're not, like, you're not going that deep. You've just got the big, you know, surface level idea, but there's so much to unpack there and, that's a really big matter, you know, even just thinking about the stuff that I'm working on in the data and the importance of keeping that secure. And I mean, it's a whole other element that I haven't even begun to cross that bridge yet, you know, but it's gonna be extremely important. So,

Stephen Thomas:
I would I would say, probably for even with all the kind of the young startups that that I mentor, you know, part of my story for them is, like, how are you are you clear on how you're gonna accept the credit card or the purchase order? And then how do you eliminate the churn kind of post, you know, onboarding of your customer? What does that enablement exercise look like, and what does that expansion look like? And again, this is something where if you're a young founder, you're product led, you haven't really thought through these things. But those are all the pivotal components to really having a fantastic kind of product led growth situation. Right? And again, you've got to find the

right time to engage the customer and teach them how to use your platform, how they're going to get more value out of it, and build community. Like there's a whole litany of things that, you know, I'm sure we both can go, you know, ad nauseam about what people need to be thinking about.

Molly Ruland:
For sure. Is there a lot of churn? It's kind of a random question. Is there a lot of churn with salespeople in that industry, or do people stick around because they know it and they build good contacts?

Stephen Thomas:
You know, in the SaaS world or in the managed service provider world?

Molly Ruland:
Managed service providers.

Stephen Thomas:
Yeah. No. Managed service providers, I would say, for the most part, tend to be smaller businesses. So think, you know, 200 employees or less, and they tend to be very culturally close. Right? So you bring it I would say, Molly, for your business, if you brought a salesperson in, you're pretty tied up to that person because they're part of your day to day engagement. And that's often true for managed service providers. So they're pretty tight, with regards to their selling teams. I wouldn't compare it to say if you thought about a Broadcom or a Cisco or someone of sort where you see BDRs who churn pretty regularly, young commercial sellers come in and churn.

Stephen Thomas:
Because again, they perceive opportunity elsewhere and they wanna go do bigger, better things, if you will.

Molly Ruland:
Well, I mean, you're selling like security, and confidence, and all of that, and so having people that have been around a little longer also really reinforces that, like, you didn't just start selling this thing last week. And so that's Well,

Stephen Thomas:
It's relationship driven too. Right? So a lot of those relationships, again, think your I would even give an example, Dallas or your tier 2 markets. We were talking about New Orleans and DC earlier. Right? But if you've had those relationships with 50 companies that you've been working with for the last 3 to 5 years, you wanna kinda continue to

cradle and manage those and grow those relationships rather than, you know, frankly, going through the effort to try and build another 50. It's not easy to do these days.

Molly Ruland:
For sure. Alright. So now I've got a wild card question for you here. Sure. Reflecting on the pivotal moments in your journey, can you define, and, can you share defining experience or mentorship that influenced your leadership style? Because I know you do a lot of mentoring.

Stephen Thomas:
Yeah. So I'm telling a brief story. He's one of my favorite people, was one of my favorites, but John Elled, who's now the president at ScanSource, was my boss at Symantec back in the day. And I've got one theme that I tell all of the folks that work for me that John really hit home for me because I used to get very into the weeds on everything that I did, right? And I still do, right? We've got to understand the really core things happening in the business, but it's the concept of leveling up, right? So if you were to take it up one level, are you solving for a symptom, or are you solving for the core problem? And so that concept of taking it up one level and making sure that you understand what's really happening and then how you might approach that challenge or that opportunity was really fundamental to kind of who I am and who I've become, and really blessed to have been part of that team with John. We've got guys in that team, like Rick Kramer, who's now a chief revenue officer, and Mike Keating, who's chief revenue officer at Biocatch. There was a really great core group of folks in that organization as well where you could kind of learn from. And we've stayed pretty tight as a group over the years. So, you know, John would certainly be that person for me.

Stephen Thomas:
And that one reminder, if anybody's facing a challenge, whether it's with a kid, a spouse, you know, a business opportunity, it's always to take it up a level. Are you solving for the symptom or are you solving for the problem?

Molly Ruland:
I like that. That's very quotable. I I I you will probably see that on your quote graphic, when we publish that. That's a good one. This is one of my favorite questions to ask because I'm a big reader. I love books. I went on a big journey a couple of years ago to read as many as I could about business development and leadership. And so, I'm curious, what is the most like, and it could be more than 1, but the most influential book is in your professional career as a leader, as a mentor?

Stephen Thomas:

Yeah. So I'm a rabbit podcast junkie. So first and foremost, let me say, for those of you that don't like to sit down and read long form, there's a ton of really fantastic podcasts, including Molly's out there, that you can go listen to. Acquired is a great one. All In is always a fun one to listen to. Maybe a little politicized right now, but nonetheless, a good listen to kinda keep you up. But book wise, for me, it's always been the sales acceleration formula by Mark Roberge, who was at HubSpot from the beginning. And the reason that I love that book for both kinds of entrepreneurs and young sales leaders is it kind of teaches that journey at a very tactical level.

Stephen Thomas:
So you get the strategy, but then he helped paint the vision of the tactics and how you then deploy those tactics to create that success. And there's great examples throughout the book, and it's really, you know, a fun read. It's an engaging read for sales leaders out there. For others, you know, I'd give one other one because he's an Austin guy, and that's Ash Myra, who wrote Running Lean. So if nobody's out there familiar with Lean Stack, if you're an entrepreneur, just a great way to remind yourself about how not to get caught up in the concept of perfection and get too good with your product, and go help find those first 10 customers. So those are 2 of my favorites. Just I think those are good anchor books, and they don't delve into the broad line. Here's this overarching leadership mantra that you need to follow.

Stephen Thomas:
It's not like, hey, you gotta go run a business. Like, let me make sure that you know how to run the business and grow it, and go, you know, frankly kick ass and take some names while doing it. Right? And recognize you're gonna step a toe, but go have a hell of a lot of fun doing

Molly Ruland:
it. I love it. One of my favorite quotes is, don't let perfect be the enemy of good.

Stephen Thomas:
Aim into that. Aim into that.

Molly Ruland:
Done is better than undone. Right? You know? That's exactly right.

Stephen Thomas:
Just check

Molly Ruland:

you can revisit it later.

Stephen Thomas:
Oh, man. So many people get in deep in their emails about, did I use the right language, or this or that, or is the product feature set perfect? And, you know, again, let your customers be the decider for you in most cases. Right? If you're putting a product out there and you believe you've got core value in the platform, great. Get it out there. Let them kick the tires and tell you it either sucks or it's great. Right? Or it's good.

Molly Ruland:
Yeah. Well, you know, and there's something to be said for imperfect writing, you know, I write like I talk, and sometimes there's typos or whatever but that's just, you know, that's who I am, right? I had a business partner for a very brief period of time and she would over analyze everything and, you know, I would write a paragraph and then she would rewrite it three times and she would write it sentence by sentence and then at the end it made no sense. And it was like, we just spent 3 days on this thing and should have been emailed 3 days ago. And it's, it's not even what I said anymore. And we really had a hard time. We didn't last for it. We're still friends, but we didn't last as business partners because of that exact I was, like, listening. We missed the deal.

Molly Ruland:
It was 3 days ago. You know what I mean? Somebody else got that deal. It's over. It's a wrap. It doesn't matter how well this paragraph is written. The window has closed. You know, we gotta keep it moving. And a lot of people

Stephen Thomas:
these days I don't know if you get emails from folks and it uses the word keen and I'm, like, that that that to me is chat gpt just all day long and and, you know, the verboseness on what are very basic, like, should be 2 sentence emails these days, you know, again, you want people to stop leaning on chat gpt to try and tell me a story and just tell me briefly, like, here's what I need to know, and do I need to take action, yes or no? Like, get to the point. We don't have time to read the paragraphs of, you know, adjectives and descriptors.

Molly Ruland:
Deep diving and maving and maestro ing and, yeah, all of the rest of

Stephen Thomas:
them,

Molly Ruland:
engaging, thrilling conversations. I actually was on chat gpt this morning and was getting really mad because I just had to log off because I'm like don't use emojis, don't use adjectives, focus on keywords, what does it do? Deep, deep dive into this new episode of rocket ship, you know, I'm like, you know, it's just like I forget it, I'm just gonna write it myself, you know what I mean? I've spent more time telling this thing not to sound like an idiot, I could just sound like an idiot on my own, you know what I mean? And leave Chi Chi PT out of it. Alright. Alright. Thank you so much for tuning in to another episode of Camp Content. This is Molly.

Matt Billman:
And this is Matt.

Molly Ruland:
And we are Heartcast Media, AKA Camp Content, and we appreciate all of your support. If you found this content valuable, please comment on social media, Linkedin, wherever you find us and we'll make sure to comment back.

Matt Billman:
And be sure to go on and subscribe and like on your favorite platforms, Spotify, iTunes, YouTube, you name it. Leave us that subscription, leave us that good review.

Molly Ruland:
We'll love you forever. So until next time, be excellent to each other, and we'll see you next week.

Produced by Heartcast Media.