



COFFEE WITH
CLOUDWERX
EPISODE 3: **LUKE SEGARS | SUBSALT**



00:09:01

Betsy Reed

Well, Luke, thank you so much for joining me today for our third installment of Coffee with CloudWerx. Super excited to sit down with you and talk more about SubSalt and learn about the unique ways you're helping your customers. I love the opportunity to meet face-to-face with our customers and hear about the inception stories for your company and so forth. So let's get started. I would love for you to give a little background, introduce yourself, and tell us a little about your company.

00:50:07

Luke Segars

Thanks for having me. So, my name's Luke Segars. I'm the CTO at Sub Salt. We're an early-stage data infrastructure startup that set out to help make sensitive data easier to use. We work with many healthcare organizations as well as some financial organizations that have sensitive data and therefore tend to be locked up in a vault of some kind.

My co-founders and I have encountered this problem in our past lives, so we set out to make it easier to use this data for good. And that's what we do.

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Betsy Reed

So in your role as CTO, are you also one of the founders?

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Luke Segars

I am, yes. We started the company about 14 months ago.

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Betsy Reed

Wow, yes, very early stage. What are some of the things that your company would consider? Challenges and opportunities always coexist. What are some of those things in the current environment that you see as both challenges and opportunities?

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Luke Segars

Great question. One of the things that turned us on to this problem is that over the last decade, it's become much easier technology-wise to use data for things like machine learning harvesting insights out of large amounts of information. At the same time, privacy has become significantly more top of mind, especially from a regulatory perspective.

So while data has become more practically useful, it's also become more practically dangerous. Especially if it's sensitive information that may put users or customers at risk of things they did not intend for you to do with their data. That is particularly prevalent in a healthcare setting.

That friction between being able to use data for big things and it being scary and dangerous to use sensitive data for those things are the big-picture trends that we're excited about. There have been many recent breakthroughs in solving this problem using modern AI. Some of this stuff has only existed as human knowledge for about five or ten years.

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Betsy Reed

It seems like the right place, right time, and something that is top of mind for executives. It spans many more departments than just your CIO organization. That risk in the security posture is something that is across the entire company.

In your role as CTO, what are you tasked with? What's on your plate, and what are some of those things that keep you up at night?

04:02:15

Luke Segars

As you probably know, roles that early-stage startups are a ballpark definition. There's much work to be done by a small number of people. At this stage, we're growing the team. We're looking to expand our talent pool. Over the last year or 14 months, a lot of my job has been exploring product market fit, which has not been uniquely my job at SubSalt. We're building something. We're not replacing a product that our customers already have.

We're trying to do a new thing and figure out how to talk about it. We want to make the product match expectations and get to a place where we can describe this problem clearly to people. Then, when they see the product, they say, "Oh, okay, this is exactly what I wanted it to be, and it works the way I expected it to work." That's been a good bit of work. Our whole platform was built on GCP. CloudWerx has really helped with the work of technical implementation – getting our hosted offering available and off the ground as well as finding partners.

I don't have a healthcare background. We got in early with a few design-build partners who have helped shape this product and make sure that we knew what it needed to do and how it fits into their compliance processes. This isn't just a technical product for technical buyers, so we needed to talk to chief legal officers, compliance teams, risk teams, and heads of ML and AI. There are many different people at the table who have opinions about this sort of thing. Ours is a complicated product to build, but it's one of the more exciting products. You can build something everyone at that table is excited about, which is what we're doing.

06:08:22

Betsy Reed

Sure. There are a lot of people at the table, but a lot of people with vested interest versus just selling into one part of the organization and others questioning, "well, why do we need this?" So that's interesting. You touched on that. I was going to ask about your internal process for this product market fit.

It sounds to me like there's a lot of work that you're doing directly with partners or subject matter experts in the healthcare space. That is the best possible way to assess insight and develop the product. Aside from that, is there any other methodology or methods you're going about that process?

I'm super fascinated. We're getting ready to build our product at CloudWerx. I am always curious about how other entrepreneurs approach product development, lifecycle, and experience.

07:02:22

Luke Segars

I could talk about this for a really long time. You want strong opinions on your side that have bumpers, like at a bowling alley. You have a general direction you want to go, but chances are you're not going in that direction right away, or you'll need some correction on your path.

That's why customers are there. It could be a major correction. Hopefully, it's more of a simple course correction. The first thing we did before we wrote any code was identify three companies with this problem and make sure that the idea resonated.

We brought them an incomplete idea, and they helped us get it to a complete state. Now we've got active feedback loops with many more groups. The more feedback loops you have, the more powerful it becomes. So now we're at a point where we're post revenue, and we've gotten some traction that we're excited about. We found some use cases where we can excel.

It's a matter of continuing to listen and pushing forward, and refining our own opinion of what we want to be when we grow up using customer feedback. We want to make sure that what we want to be when we grow up is something that people want to exist.

08:39:06

Betsy Reed

Yes, exactly. It sounds like a good process. I love the metaphor of the bumpers. You have to make sure you're throwing as straight as possible, but customers are there to correct you. Ultimately you can pull off those spares and strikes. That's the target.

08:54:02

Luke Segars

That's the target. That's right.

08:56:04

Betsy Reed

That's great. As we built out our customer service and the model for our support in our professional technical services, something that we took very seriously was our desire to provide a unique experience for customers. When they're asked, "why would I work with a partner? What's the point?" they know, without a doubt, what that purpose is. This isn't to be negative or disparage any other partners. When we would get introduced to customers, sometimes they didn't know they cycle. "Gosh, I just work with Google, and what's the point in a partner?" I would love to hear your perspective, now that you have worked with us for a while, did you have hesitation or reluctance to work with a partner?

09:53:13

Luke Segars

I wasn't expecting it initially. I didn't know one way or the other what to expect on that front. But it quickly became apparent that this wasn't going to be just another call in the chain that I had to get through to solve a problem.

I remember our first call with those folks on your team, and I realized I needed someone to help with some of these things. They were able to point out stuff we should be thinking about and keep cloud costs under control. Setting up basic alerts for when we leave 15 GPUs running. You can miss simple stuff when running in all different directions as an early-stage company. It doesn't have to be a big boost. Just someone who can help be a technical bumper to go back to the bowling alley thing. Somebody that can help you point you in the right direction one month faster is a game changer. That happens on repeat with CloudWerx, and that's really helpful for us as we're refining things and changing things all the time.

You're a partner we can count on not just to send us the bills or whatever but to help make our business a whole lot better than it otherwise would have been.

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Betsy Reed

That's awesome. Thank you so much for sharing that. And that sums up our commitment and our vision for the company. To hear it from a customer literally gives me chills. I take it so seriously because it's what we set out to do and commit to daily. I love that.

Luke, tell me more just about yourself. Who's Luke? I know you live in Seattle. Besides being a CTO at an early-stage company, what are some of the things you like to do when you're not being a co-founder and CTO?

12:05:07

Luke Segars

I'm a dad-to-be in a couple of weeks here which is so exciting. I moved to Seattle about a year ago, and I've just been exploring the Pacific Northwest. I've gotten really into swimming up here, which is a good way to unplug from the computer and the screen. These days I'm thinking a lot about the company. Not just the product and the technology but about building the company, which is as exciting as the product building in many ways.

Where do I want this thing to go, and how do we get there? Trying to meet people who can help make that real is more than a work responsibility. It makes me curious about people and understands them better. That's something that I wanted to do in my "free time.

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Betsy Reed

Right. I understand there are no boundaries. This was wonderful. It was an absolute treasure to spend some time with you, Luke.

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Luke Segars

Well, likewise, Betsy, thanks so much for your time. It was wonderful to meet you, and thanks for everything you and your team are doing.

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Betsy Reed

Yes. And happy, safe, and healthy Thanksgiving. And also, if I don't talk to you before, you better let me know when that little baby comes!

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Luke Segars

I'll get you guys a picture, okay? Thanks, Betsy. See you later.