

## DFW firm with access to tens of thousands of workers at homes sees surge after investment



Kim Houlne, president and chief executive at Working Solutions

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Kim Houlne's company was way ahead of the home-based office trend. Now, the CEO with access to tens of thousands of workers is seeing more growth, bolstered by a fresh investment.

Working Solutions is getting more traction with clients as it helps companies find help with areas that can include back-office support and customer care. Persistent changes in the economy are helping drive interest beyond the earlier days of the pandemic.

"We have established some great relationships," Houlne said. "For the most part, clients are finding value in outsourcing because it's so challenging right now to find somebody."

In 2020, the company saw revenue beat expectations by nearly 20 percent. It's close to that number again in 2021.

Around the start of this year, the company announced a long-term investment from Housatonic Partners, a private equity firm focused on growth companies. While there are no specifics on the amount provided, it was more than \$10 million, Houlne said. Housatonic, founded in 1994, is managing over \$1.3 billion.

"I wanted to have that private equity backing, so that we could really seriously go to the next level," she said.

The company has grown to have approximately 180,000 folks who are eligible to be agent contractors, Houlne said. Agents are independent contractors, and work at their own discretion. They are all remote, working from home, she said.

Houlne gave more of her thoughts in an interview.

**What happened during the pandemic and what were some of the lessons you learned and saw with your company?**

You see labor arbitrage happening. Somebody is jumping to the

next company for 25 cents more per hour at least on the call center side. So, we're finding that our customers and clients who thought that things had leveled off have now flipped back, flipped upside down — because they can't keep a strong and stable workforce so they're needing to look to us as an outsourcer to kind of help fill in the gaps. Everybody is moving around so much that our business has fortunately stayed very busy because of it. It's either people-driven or it's customer-driven. We can support them either way.

**What are some areas you're getting interest?**

Right now, what's really booming is kind of remote-educational opportunities. So, there are a lot of software companies out there that are creating platforms and opportunities for companies to take their education online — or for school districts to take their education online. For example, we took on an account that does remote proctoring. So when somebody has to take an exam at a college level, or certification exam at a professional level, you need a proctor. You can't just take that remotely from your home. So somebody is actually watching you take that test.

**What are some other sectors that you have been getting traction with?**

We had a lot of travel, actually prior. Some of our travel has not done well, and some of the travel, they can't keep up with it. So, travel is a big component of ours. Many of the travel companies were offering vouchers for travel at a later time. So, people were calling in like crazy to change their travel plans during COVID to get a voucher for somewhere else. And now that the world is somewhat opening, all of that volume is coming right back because people are really antsy to get out there. Consumer healthcare and consumer health products and exercise products are. Online real estate is a big product of ours.

**How are you doing in getting folks to work for you?**

We're fortunate because we have the entire United States as basically our recruiting area. We recruit from most states in the country, and we are finding a lot of responses from some of the states that may not have as a robust recovery in their economy. And that's worked out for us. We're tapping into states like Louisiana and Mississippi, Tennessee and South Carolina — some of those southeastern states. In Texas, we're a bit unusual because our economy is so robust. We just came back with leaps and bounds, but there are some states that aren't enjoying that success.

**What do you really see for the future of Working Solutions?**

We took on a private equity partner, our first time ever, which was fabulous. I see amazing things happening with us over the next several years. I'm hoping to maybe look for acquisitions that maybe we can latch on to what we have to offer — maybe looking to get into some different types of on-demand services, instead of contact centers. There's a lot of different things out there in the medical field from a nursing perspective, from a physician perspective. So, I have a lot of great plans, and I'm super excited I'm more excited now than I have been because I have a strong partner behind me.

*This interview has been edited for brevity and clarity.*