



Pasquale Romano, ChargePoint President and CEO
Mike Talley, ChargePoint VP Services & Support

Charged up and ready to help

New ChargePoint customer and driver support center ready for exponential growth and global expansion

Story and photos by Joe Sage

The bustling commercial stretch of Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community along the Loop 101 freeway in the northeast Valley—home to corporate offices, Arizona Diamondbacks spring training, casinos, hotels, a huge auto mall and more—has gained a prominent new tenant. EV charging pioneer ChargePoint recently had their ribbon-cutting for a new facility here.

ChargePoint is the world's largest electric vehicle charging network, with nearly 40,000 charging spots and growing. The company is ten years old as of September, still considered a startup despite its maturity, as it's a young industry overall.

ChargePoint is the only EV charging technology company that designs, develops and manages the manufacturing of charging solutions—from hardware to software, energy management to tech.

"We're the only company in the world, regardless of size, that is in every single segment," says ChargePoint CEO Pasquale Romano. "We want the user's experience to be as simple and transparent as possible, because if it is, more people buy EVs and we have a happier planet. And we have a happier Arizona, because we'll expand the business, we'll hire more people, and all the goodness that comes along with that will happen. And drivers will have a great time."

Most of ChargePoint's 7,000 customers are businesses buying multiple units. Charging stations become an attraction for employees proud to be part of a company with cutting edge thinking, and for business patrons who can top off their charge painlessly while parked for errands anyway.

"Philosophically," says Romano, "the simplest way to think about us is that our customers are business owners, and our products are used to either take care of their employees or their customers. We don't make money on the EV drivers. We take good care of those folks on behalf of our customers. We make money by providing turnkey services so anyone can put EV parking in their parking lot and it just all works. It's all seamlessly

meshed together in one global experience. We feed the locations of chargers, if they want to be known, to every mapping provider under the sun. Several vehicle manufacturers have ChargePoint feed directly into the nav system. We want to make sure we cover the driver from where they live, to where they work, to when they go on a road trip or are doing stuff around town. We are a 360-degree company with respect to life as an EV driver. We really want to make it simple and seamless.

"EV charging is something you're going to do while you're parked. What fueling now becomes is something you do while you're doing something else. It's really not a chore anymore. Your car is always full, where you work, where you live, where you shop, and certainly you'll have it on the highways when you're on a road trip."

ChargePoint is the only company with 24/7 driver support, with hundreds of thousands on their network today. This vital part of the business is where the Arizona facility comes in.

"If we're doing our job correctly," says Romano, "this call center will not get called that often. Life never works that way, but we do have an unprecedentedly low rate of contact into this call center. And when one does get past the goalie, we want to make sure our folks really embrace that driver. We remember what they're trying to do: this is not their primary focus—they're trying to get on to something else. We try to take care of them and get them on their way.

"We invest heavily in support," says Romano, "We all know how big a difference support operations make in the customer experience. We sell service and support packages to companies that install our chargers, just so we can take all the hassle out of it. We're betting our products and services are going to be so good that this team is going to have a fairly light load from that.

"The customer wants the peace of mind that in case something *does* happen, they don't have a big variable cost. We're giving our customers the ability to sort of 'set and forget' EV charging in their parking lot and not have to worry about it, knowing it's just going to work like a clock. While I am an engineer and very proud of our products and services, I know this support organization is every bit as important in our customers' opinion of

us as the products themselves. People just like to feel they're going to be properly taken care of."

Support staff in Arizona has grown from just six in 2014 to about 50 in the new location. It absorbs a center previously based in Costa Rica; despite higher costs stateside, the company recognizes the benefits of engagement in the community they serve. The facility has room to grow to 70 employees, with elbow room for expansion beyond that.

Plug-in vehicle sales in the US continue to grow at record levels, and Arizona has the second-fastest growth rate in the country, 200 percent (three-fold) from 2015 to 2017. In metro Phoenix alone, EV registrations were up nearly 50 percent in the first quarter of 2017 versus first quarter 2016. "It doesn't take that many years of that kind of trend level for EVs to be something absolutely everyone is going to have experience with, at least know someone who owns one," says Romano. "There are about 10,000 EVs on the road in Arizona, maybe more. That's a good start, and the growth rates are so high, that number is going to climb precipitously over the next few years."

Commercial installations abound in Arizona, with GoDaddy, Wells Fargo and Dignity Health among the highest in number of sessions per year.

Scottsdale alone had about 10,000 sessions last year, a lot for a town of 250,000 people and enough to prevent 41,000 kg (about 90,000 pounds or 45 tons) of greenhouse gas emissions. And this was from just the first 69 installations at a variety of employers, resorts, shopping and services such as Westin Kierland, GoDaddy and Mayo Clinic.

Nationally, the list of installations is not only very big but very broad, from Walgreens and Safeway to 3M and John Deere in the Midwest. "This is not a tech trend in tech companies," says Romano. "This is an everywhere trend in every kind of company where people drive and park—where they work, where they live—and most people work at companies like these.

"It's coming, and if you look at charging spots on our network, we're exactly in lockstep with the penetration of EVs. More cars come into the community and more EV chargers go in to support them. It's not a build-ahead model, it's a build-with model. It's a parking model, so as the percent of EVs in a parking lot goes up, more chargers have to go in to support them."

Being able to rely on expert support anytime encourages more drivers to make the shift to EVs. Day or night, EV drivers can call for help finding or using a charging station, or to check on their account. ChargePoint is also dedicated to delivering world-class support to businesses that own its stations, with a warranty and responsive support

to keep stations working smoothly everywhere.

"We assist station owners and our channel partners who resell our products with installing, managing, administering and maintaining their EV charging stations," says VP of Services & Support Mike Talley. "These are devices that are out on a curb, they sit out in the sun, people pull up to them and use them, people back into them, every now and then there are accidents, and they need to be maintained. We are here to help our charging station owners do that. We remotely support them or do on-site dispatch through our Assure warranty and maintenance programs. The warranty includes a full year of on-site maintenance, proactive station monitoring, and monthly and quarterly reporting about its use. All those operations are conducted from here.

"Every month, more than a million people use our 39,000 stations to fuel up an EV. Our 50 employees here today handle 16,000 driver inquiries and 4,000 site owner inquiries a month. We track, measure and provide analytics on our product performance. Once a product is built, sold and put on the curb, no other company has a better touch and feel to what's actually happening. We track that information, we analyze it and pump it back into development, marketing and our processes.

"We measure customer satisfaction to make sure we're doing it right and at the same time making customers happy."

ChargePoint has invested more than \$10 million in Scottsdale since 2014. This latest half-million-dollar investment is underscored by a five-year commitment to the facility, with the ability to double the number of jobs at the location in the future. The center currently dispatches repairs across the US and Canada and is in the process of rapidly—as soon as late September—being operational in four countries in Europe (UK, France, Germany and The Netherlands) with exactly the same products and services as in the US, with the same look and feel to the degree that those countries' regulations allow.

"The shift to electric mobility generates many benefits: cost savings for drivers, new marketing tools for businesses and significant environmental savings," says Romano. "The explosion of jobs related to electric mobility is too often overlooked, but our expansion in Arizona, Europe and around the world reflects that the transition to electric mobility is well under way and represents a massive opportunity to create jobs and revitalize communities. We look forward to continuing to work with the local community in Scottsdale and hiring more people."

The ChargePoint Arizona team is surely going to be busier and busier. ■

