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Riding the Wave: A Vendor's Pipeline

By T.C. Doyle, Rich Cirillo, VARBusiness

Mon. Aug. 13, 2001

Savvy vendors, too, recognize fostering alliances can engender loyalty as well as increase business. Just look at Compaq Computer, which in a bid to increase its overall services output, made moves recently to expand the role it plays in selling IT solutions to SMB clients. In fact, the company's CEO, Michael Capellas, has called the market the fastest-growing sector in IT solutions, and the hardware vendor recently announced plans to create a number of solution sets geared specifically to the SMB market. In addition to the direct efforts of its Compaq Global Services unit, the company says it is trying to leverage SMB-focused partners more effectively by giving them more resources and streamlining the way their relationships operate.

And in announcing a new business model and an upgrade to its successful Unicenter line of enterprise network management solutions, Computer Associates put out the call for its partners to expand further into the SMB market as well. Company executives, who recently unveiled the new Unicenter solutions at CA World in Orlando, Fla., say the new modular, flexible architecture lets solution providers sell quick-to-market solutions to clients who may have a need for one specific area of Unicenter but not the whole package, making it a perfect fit for the SMB crowd.

"The SMB marketplace is one that effectively, given the CA resources, we would never be able to cover like we need to. We just won't," says president and CEO Sanjay Kumar. "Traditional partners and solution providers are very focused in that space."

Microsoft, however, looks forward to broadening a pilot project it launched to increase the number of companies pushing Microsoft software in the small-business market. The "Commission Agent" program has been under way for four months and now involves 1,000 organizations, many of which are too small for Microsoft's more formalized Certified Partner Program. In time, Clough says the program, which is an agent program that pays commissions to third-party agents for sending license sales to a Bellevue, Wash.-based company called License Online, could someday involve tens of thousands of companies.

By coming up with a framework for cooperation, Clough says Microsoft has been able to attract many companies that don't want to manage license sales to the

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small-customer base, or who left that business for one reason or another. "What I like most is that I am seeing a great deal of repeat business," Clough says. "Many companies are seeing multiple opportunities through this program."

Who knows. You could be one of them.

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