

Tier-2 Partners geared up to grow fast

... they need to be empowered

The Indian IT market cannot think of thriving or surviving without the help of channel partners. It is simply because of the vast geography and dispersed enterprises across the country, which acts as a hurdle for every vendor in terms of their reach. That is the reason, Dell, which believes in direct marketing, has adopted a channel strategy, especially for India. Although the large enterprises are very easy to be addressed because of their distinctive nature but enterprises in the form of Home, SoHo, SMBs, SMEs are very difficult to be addressed and reached. Even though there are clusters for various industry verticals these days, yet, to catch hold of the entire customers breadth and identify their need is really a tough task. Therefore, engagement of channel partners is inevitable.

In this backdrop, vendors or the principals have two types of engagements – tier-1 and tier-2. In the tier-1 engagement, the vendors engage large partners like Infosys, HCL, TCS, Wipro, Accenture, and et al, who are normally the large solution providers, SIs or VARs. This engagement normally happens directly and these people are responsible for large integration. On the other hand, the tier-2 partners are normally engaged through the distributors.

The number of this segment is very large and they contribute substantially to the business of every product and solution vendor.

The tier-2 partners are normally responsible for entry-level products, which do not require value addition or almost like boxes, but, of late, there has been a change in the attitude of these partners. They are enhancing their capability and entering into the solution or integration space. This is, of course, a natural evolution in the industry, which is happening with the maturity of the industry. However, most of the top vendors who carry the portfolio of complex products are not able to react to this change very swiftly.

In fact, IBM offers its entire range of system X products, entry-level storage products and entry-level P series products, which is the high-end products in itself, through the tier-2 channel partners. These partners are involved in both PartnerWorld and Express PartnerAdvantage programme of the company.

IBM's Channel initiatives are created upon the basis of being in tune with the evolving partner needs, understanding their primary growth drivers and establishing a two-way communication channel with them which in turn ensures a mutually beneficial partnership for all involved. Initiatives from IBM

include incentives, co-marketing funds or special benefits for the channel partners in India.

Anoop G. Nambiar, Country Manager – Business Partner Organization, IBM India/South Asia, says, "We launched the Partner Sales Service Centre in

outstanding contribution in providing innovative solutions and improving customer satisfaction across India. IBM is also focussing on factors such as partner enablement, training and scalability. The challenge is trying to raise levels of awareness among partners



Surajit Sen

Director- Channel, Alliances & Market, NetApp

India across four regions designed to provide channel partners with services specific to sales opportunities. The unit is a centralized team operating from IBM that will help business partners with product positioning competitive updates customized customer configuration and customized product pricing a company."

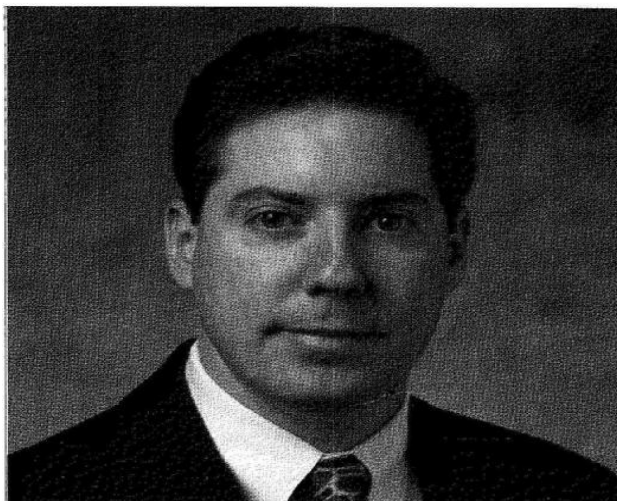
He added, "We announced the Easy Sell Programme for Business Partners so as to enable them to enhance their responsiveness and turnaround time in relation to partner led sales opportunities in India. Initiatives like these highlight our commitment in creating an enabling environment through collaborations with Business Partners, thereby creating value for customers of all sizes and across all verticals. The Easy Sell Programme will help us better position the products and propose the best solution to the customer with an emphasis on technology and its implication to business."

IBM felicitated the top Indian Business Partners with the 2008 Beacon Awards for their

and customers in the adoption of best practices and sustaining the momentum within the challenge in terms of their interest and growth. The IBM STG University is one such initiative. Now in the fifth consecutive term, the STG University has been extremely successful training and certification programme that enables channel partners to better understand IBM's System Portfolio and also reiterates our commitment for our channel partners.

HP has also similar activities to empower the channel partners. They have recently created a partner advisory board wherein they try to understand how to empower the tier-2 channel partners to sell value products. HP even is appointing channel relationship managers, who can help the partners to scale up and scale out. The company is planning to take its channel advisory board to each of the regions in the country.

Cisco believes that businesses in Tier-2 and Tier-3 markets across India today have unprecedented access to new markets, suppliers



Jim Simon

Director of Marketing, Quantum Asia-Pacific

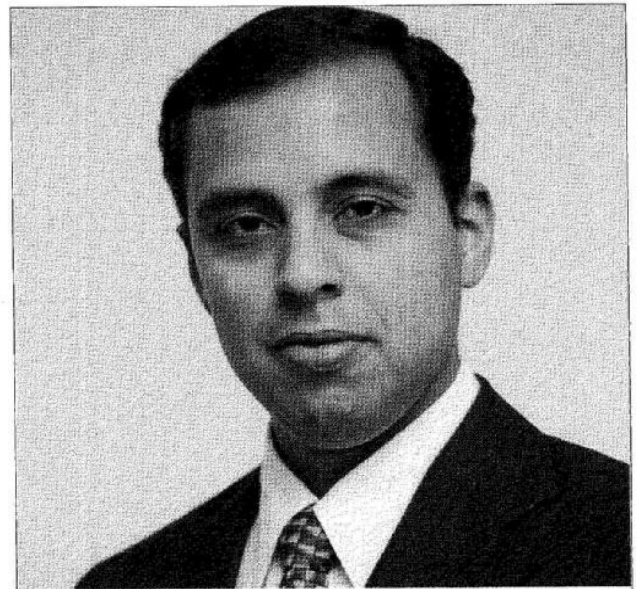
and customers. Cisco's growing focus on these markets is the Small and Medium Businesses (SMBs), which is the fastest growing segment for Cisco in India (Cisco's Commercial vertical in India, which consists of SMBs and mid-market companies, is growing at over 50% year on year).

Cisco has a strong channel network with over 900 resellers in 100 cities and has announced its plans to identify 300 channel partners, specifically certified to cater to the SMB customers, especially in tier-2 and tier-3 cities. Cisco ensures that the partners are equipped with the right skills and constantly updated on new technologies specially developed for SMB sector through its partner training programmes across the nation.

The business landscape in tier-2 and tier-3 cities is undergoing tremendous change in sectors like IT services, manufacturing, auto and textile, among others. Also, traditional industries in these cities are finding an increased need to adopt advanced telecommunication technologies to stay globally competitive. Also, favourable business conditions have led to rapid proliferation of regional clusters in the country. For example, Ahmedabad has emerged as a hub for textiles, gems & jewellery, processed foods, cement and allied products, ceramics, glassware, minerals and leather. Cisco offers domain specific solutions to help customers in each of these sub-verticals plan, design and operate business-critical networks more efficiently.

In order to enable the tier-2 partners, the company has launched Select Certification Programme and SMB specialization for its channel partners who will focus on the SMB market. Select Certified Partners benefit from an increased level of support from Cisco, including access to best-in-class products and services, technical support, productivity tools, online training, and marketing resources. Last year, in India, Parag Arora, Regional Manager - Channels, Cisco India, says, "We have added channel management capacity by recruiting phone-based Channel account managers to extend support to our SMB-focussed reseller partners."

Cisco invests in training for the channel partners. The company conducts extensive training programmes to equip its channel partners with the right skills and technical knowledge. These programmes are carried across tier-1, tier-2 and tier-3 cities across the country. The company also helps the partners through its Partner Help Online mechanism. It is a direct online support path for any partner issues, including complete pre-sales technical, and product design assistance. Cisco has extensive support system for customers with 9 rapid fulfilment depots in the country. These depots help partners with spares and product replacement on a next business day, provided the partner has signed a service contract. Besides, Cisco has an extensive distribution network with 30 stocking point locations across the country. Cisco can reach out to any



Parag Arora
Regional Manager - Channels, Cisco India

city through these stocking points.

For Netapp, FAS2000 & FAS3000 are the midrange products and FAS6000 is the high-end series of products. Netapp sells all these products through its channel partners, though the company has different categories of partners and most of them are eligible to resell its entire range of products. Surajit Sen, Director - Channel, Alliances & Market, NetApp, says, "We have a partner enablement programme owned by our Channel Team. This programme is backed by sales and pre-sales accreditation programmes. We run periodic promos and reward programmes for partner reps and SEs to generate interest in our products." "We have a team of channel development manager and Technical Partner Advisor who are responsible for all aspects of partner development. This includes business planning, account planning, working on go-to-market activities, regular Partner Academies and workshops to enable partner," he adds.

Patton Electronics sells telecommunications products in the Indian market. Ashwani Dhar, National Manager - Channel Sales, Patton Electronics India, says, "The trend in the telecommunications field is of rapid technological changes and those channels irrespective of their tier status with up-to-date technical skills will have the market share. So, preference is given to the capability to handle the new technology and state-of-the-

art totally integrated systems.

The company employs Web-based tools to roll out Product Familiarity training and Smart Sales Courses for its channels. It is followed by products Certification Courses for both for sales & technical teams to empower them to address the product positioning, solutions and any issues on the spot.

Besides, Patton has a robust mailing system run from its global headquarters at Gaithersburg (USA), which caters to any new product launch, technology enhancements in existing line as well as promotional offers for products based on market trends and needs.

Quantum sells Data backup, Recovery and Archive solutions in India and the partners are able to leverage Quantum's long-standing expertise in the tape media, tape drive, automated tape library and disk-based backup markets. Jim Simon, Director of Marketing, Quantum Asia-Pacific, says, "From our stackable and flexible work group libraries up to our highly reliable Enterprise solutions, Quantum Scalar tape libraries seamlessly manage and protect business-critical data in all business environments. With an emphasis on investment optimization, our tape libraries grow with the business needs and capitalize on initial investment. Quantum tape libraries deliver high availability, superior performance and infinite scalability for medium-size business, workgroup and data



Sudha Jagadish
COO, Dax Networks

centre environments. Some of the products in this segment are Scalar 10K, Scalar i2000 and Scalar i500.”

Organizations finish projects faster and confidently store more data at a lower cost with Quantum’s data management software StorNext. Quantum’s enterprise software provides high-performance data sharing and intelligent archiving that is compatible with an industry-leading range of operating systems, server platforms, and storage devices to preserve user choice.

Quantum has a long-term strategy of working with channel partners to meet the needs of India IT organizations. Quantum solutions are sold both via a two-tier (distributor then value-added reseller) and one-tier (premier value-added reseller) model. All Quantum resellers receive pre- and post-sales training so that they are qualified to properly evaluate their customers’ backup, recovery, and archive (BURA) challenges, match a Quantum solution, and ensure complete customer satisfaction.

Through its “Quantum Alliance Programme”, the company provides sales support and training, up-to-date product and promotional information, service support and marketing support to its partners. Quantum has introduced several reward programmes to boost channel sales. We regularly communicate the latest product offerings, reward programmes, promotions and trends in the market with the partners through newsletters,

focussed events, and other forums.

Besides the engagement policy, the vendors also stand by the partners to ensure all kinds of supports. Simon says, “We have a Channel Partner Manager who is focussed on building the relationship with Quantum’s authorized channel partners. In addition to that, Quantum Alliance is our best-in-class partner programme and is designed to help resellers and distributors around the world increase their sale of Quantum’s Tape Libraries, Autoloaders, Disk-Based Backup Systems, Drives and Media products.”

Dax Networks is the home-grown networking company. Sudha Jagadish, COO, Dax Networks, says, “Depending on the project and end-user requirements, the company markets mid- and high-end products through its tier-2 partners. It has currently 200 Authorized Dax Solution Providers (ADSPs) across the country. The strategy of the company in terms of empowering the partners is that they send technology and products information in the form of newsletters to the channel partners on a monthly basis. Even, to some eligible partners, they send price-lists. It is sent before 15th of every month by its channel relationship team. This ensures that the partners and their sales teams to have the ready-made price on their desk on time, which allows the partner to have a clarity on the price and the



Ashwani Dhar
National Manager – Channel Sales, Patton Electronics India Private Ltd.

specification of the product when they specify the same to their customers.

Sudha Jagadish says, “On top of all these, our monthly decentralized technical trainings conducted in various cities play a vital role in enhancing the technical and product knowledge to our partners. Dax also has a reward programme for the channel partners called ‘Dax Drona’. These ADSPs have a critical role to play in the success of the company and the Drona Reward Programme is a means of acknowledging their efforts.”

The Dax toll-free Helpdesk provides higher level support to Dax customers and prospects. The Helpdesk attends to all technology, logistics and service queries. While the CRM software deployed would ensure accuracy in problem identification, the toll-free line would ensure real-time response. The toll-free number is 1-800-4255-Dax. Besides, there is a Live Chat option for the channel partners. Through this, the company offers significantly high level of support and improved online experience to its visitors.

services specific to sales opportunities. Partner Sales Support Centre representatives are available throughout the week, Monday-Friday, during working hours through a toll-free number or via email.

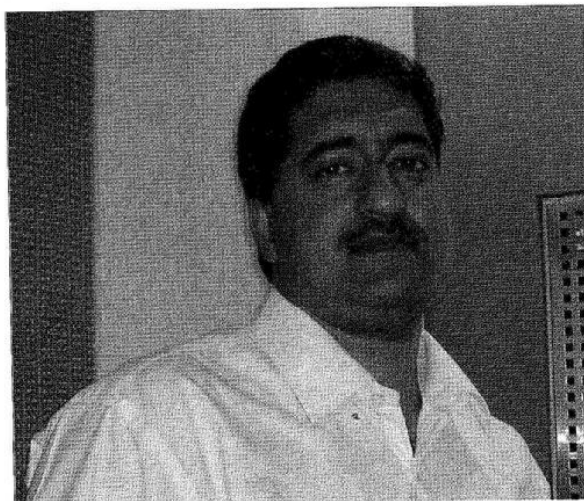
Nambiar says, “Through IBM.com, we have been selling about 10 different service offerings such as email security services and NOC (Network Operations Centre) inside, a network management service, to small and medium businesses in India.”

As Cisco’s paramount importance is to ensure that its partners accelerate growth, differentiate their business and increase profitability, the company offers certifications, specializations and incentives to achieve so. Cisco’s Partner Enablement Tools make it easier for the Partners to more effectively sell, deliver and support Cisco technologies and solutions. These tools could be marketing & sales tools, technical tools, support tools and delivery tools.

IBM is investing to strengthen education, demand generation and technical support to business partners. Moreover, the company is working closely with ISVs in the region to encourage mid-market centric application development using Express Advantage. That essentially means that IBM is leveraging local partners to better understand its SMB customers and build the right kind of solutions for them. The Partner Sales Support Centre is a new initiative designed to provide customers throughout India with

Dhar of Patton Electronics says, “We have developed a very transparent and systematic Channel approach & strategy; wherein the majority of partner issues are taken care of. We employ direct mailers to our Channel Partners to keep them updated about our programmes.’ The partners’ sales force is also empowered through a lot of initiatives, i.e. Smart Sale Courses, Joint Market Visits Teleconferencing, Promotional Offers (periodical), Sale Incentive Programmes, etc.”

Fluke Networks sales portabl



Sameer Mathur
Head, Solution Partners Organization, Personal Systems Group, HP India

test tools for cable, network and application connectivity troubleshooting, Portable Network Analyzers, Software-based WAN traffic and response time analysis tools, appliance-based multi-tiered application response time analysis solutions, VoIP and MPLS Cos analysis tools through the tier-2 partners. Alamuri Sitaramaiah, General Manager – Sales, Fluke Networks, India, says, –“We enable the partners through training, support during solutions positioning. We also provide demos, rewards in achieving breakthroughs in sales.”

All Websense products are sold through the channel partners. The company has a comprehensive India channel partner programme through which it provides its registered partners sales, pre-sales support along with agreed rebate and rewards which are announced on a quarterly basis. Websense recently appointed Inflow Technologies as its Authorized Training Partner (ATP). Last quarter, the training was complete in Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore and Chennai in which around 85 engineers were certified (Certified Websense Security Engineer – Web Security). Websense has three levels of partnership Platinum, Gold, and Silver and partner. Mr. Jyoti Prakash, Channel Manager for SAARC, Websense, is responsible for development of channel network. Websense uses combinations of platforms – events, planning & review meetings, newsletters, special communications and reward programme announcements to inform partners about various company updates.

Jyoti Prakash further says, “Apart from initial sales enablement, Websense holds monthly booster trainings for its partner’s sales teams across India. Along with this, Websense has online learning system – Websense University where sales engineers can enroll for self learning.”

Sanovi Technologies delivers disaster recovery management software focussed on aligning DR infrastructure with Recovery Time and Recovery Point objectives. The company offers sales/pre-sales and technical trainings to its partners in order to enable them. The field sales teams work very closely with the partners and run joint campaigns with them at customer situations.

As per Sunil Sapra, Country Manager, India & SAARC, WatchGuard Technologies, WatchGuard works through two types of partners – WatchGuard Secure Partners (WSPs) and associate partners. He says, –“WatchGuard WSP programme is recognized as one of the best in industry.”

Our WSPs are our lifeline and they are fully capable of positioning and supporting our high-end solutions. In case an associate partner wants to work on a high-end solution, we work with him to architect the right solution, train his sales and technical team or align them with one of our WSPs. WatchGuard has a partner portal, which has most of information for the partners including online training and certifications, where a channel partner’s team can visit and benefit by information on product details, product positioning, comparison matrix, promos, etc. The company also conducts regular trainings for the partners. Sunil says, “Almost every week, you will find a WatchGuard sales/pre-sales or hands-on training going on in some city. In the last two months, we have conducted at least six such trainings.”

There are regional channel managers based in Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore. The India team is supported by the APAC marketing team, who is in regular touch with our partners.

WatchGuard invests in buying customer databases and share it with our partners. Such databases are the starting points for any tele-sales team. Sunil says, “We have also provided our partners with the call scripts to qualify a lead. Our trainings are open even to tele-sales teams and we have seen good participation in the past. We have also launched various incentive programmes for tele-sales teams at every stage of the sale; from generating a lead, qualifying a lead to the successful closures.” astTECS Communications is the telecom solution provider based out of Bangalore. Their focus is on open source Asterisk-based PBX solution.

DeVasia Kurian, Managing Director, astTECS Communications, says, “We are focussed on upgrading the skill sets of the partners to help them move up the value chain and position of Asterisk PBX solutions. Our Channel Partner



Jyoti Prakash

Channel Manager – SAARC, Websense Inc.

Programme has been designed to help partner’s maximize and increase their profitability. The astTECS Channel programme is targeted towards long-term customer and partner retention. Through qualified business partner relationships, astTECS customers can be confident and assured that their real needs are addressed today and tomorrow. Our partners are key to business strategy and we look forward to maintaining a regular dialogue with them, ensuring mutual success.”

The company has a team of relationship managers and a complete ecosystem for the resellers with completely configured packages, competitive prices, sales training, technical training, excellent help desk, etc.

Microsoft has a host of products for the markets, including Microsoft Office 2007, Windows Server 2008, Exchange Server 2007, SQL Server 2008, Microsoft Forefront Security, Windows Small Business Server 2003 R2, Windows Vista Business, Microsoft Dynamics and Microsoft Dynamics range of products. All these products are sold through the channel partners. They are empowered by Microsoft using various mechanisms. The company is also offering under hosted model, wherein customers can have their offerings as a subscription service.

SANAT Technologies is a network storage solution

company, which provides solutions from 1 TB to 108 TB through the channel partners. Ramani, Country Manager – Sales & Marketing, SANAT Technologies, strongly believes in enabling the channel partners to identify and sniff opportunities, which is why the company gives importance to sales training.

They have a dedicated marketing Coordinator who helps manage Lead locking, Partner Sales Support, etc. The company is also planning to set up a Sales Support Centre (SSC) to help prepare BOMs for customers.

iValue solution set covers the entire life cycle adoption of the customers, which include on-demand UTM solutions. In the mid- to high-end solutions, iValue has advanced SSL VPN, DNS & DHCP Management, SSL Authentication, Disaster Recovery and High Availability solutions. The company focusses on empowering the partners to successfully market them. One of the key items on our agenda is to implement joint market development practices with its channel partners. This translates into providing handholding through the complete sales cycle, joint demos and POCs, end-to-end partner empowerment that covers technical, soft skills and sales training and in certain critical cases providing Tech Partner mindshare. ■