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Top 10 MVPs; SBS 2011 Review

Redmond Channel Partner

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MEET THE

CONTENDERS

A look at the Windows Phone 7 devices that Microsoft hopes to ride into the smartphone race.



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We size up the devices that Microsoft is hoping will carry its Windows Phone 7 platform—to relevance or better—in the fast-moving smartphone market.

28 Inside the Cool Crowd

The new MVP Nation conference held right after Microsoft's MVP Summit got Microsoft's independent product authorities talking about the cloud, Small Business Server and the state of the Most Valuable Professional program.

Plus: RCP's Top 10 Microsoft Partner MVPs

33 SBS 2011

For shops of 25 to 75 seats with traditional IT requirements, the on-premises version of Microsoft Small Business Server still makes a lot of sense, and the new release contains a lot for partners and IT to like.

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SPECIAL PULLOUT SECTION



PARTNER'S GUIDE TO MSP HARDWARE

Having the right hardware in place can make a big difference in keeping managed services provider-based costs down—and profits up.

By Scott Bekker

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THE 2011 MICROSOFT PRODUCT ROADMAP

Be sure to check out *RCP's* product roadmap, which is updated each time changes or new releases for products are announced.

RCPmag.com/Roadmap2011

MARKETING MATTERS:

MAXIMIZE NETWORKING VALUE

Networking doesn't come easy for everyone, but if you follow Barb Levisay's advice, you can take your first steps in the right direction:

- * Meet local business owners at the Chamber of Commerce.
- * Build partnering relationships through IAMCP and HTG Peer Groups.
- * Focus on your niche through professional organizations.

For more tips and how to implement them, read the entire column online.

RCPmag.com/Levisay0511

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BLOGS

RCPU

Stay tuned to channel news with the Redmond Channel Partner Update e-mail newsletter, written by Lee Pender.



ON WINDOWS PHONE 7 LOSING MARKET SHARE

We're not sure what—if anything—is wrong with Windows Phone 7, but technology moves quickly, especially in the mobile world. Android has rocketed up the market-share table over the last few years. If Windows Phone 7 is going to do the same thing, it's going to have to do it from a big hole that it has dug itself in its first few months of existence. We can't really see why users would adopt Microsoft's mobile OS en masse, so low market share might be a continuing condition. But falling market share? That's just embarrassing—and borderline unbelievable.

RCPmag.com/PenderA0511

ON GOOGLE LAUNCHING APPS CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Yes, Google Apps has a growing reseller program, and participants come from all sorts of practice backgrounds, including Microsoft. As is the case with the Microsoft certification system, diploma-toting Google partners will be able to separate themselves from their competitors and gain some cloud credibility in the IT landscape.

RCPmag.com/PenderB0511

BY THE NUMBERS

PAM Quality

In our annual reader survey, we asked Gold Certified Partners "How has the quality of your interaction with Partner Account Managers changed over the last few years?"

28%

Quality of PAM support is improving

36%

Quality of PAM support is about the same

18%

Quality of PAM support is declining

18%

Not applicable (new to MPN or don't have one)

SOURCE: RCP READER SURVEY 2011

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BY SCOTT BEKKER

Partners Will Need More Windows Intune Licenses

With most of its products, Microsoft shrewdly showers partners with free (or nearly free) licenses. Encouraging internal usage creates familiarity, and that comfort with new products generates sales. For some reason, Microsoft is being comparatively stingy with the

partner licenses for Windows Intune, the cloud-based systems management and security toolset that launched in March.

Partners enrolling in the free Microsoft Cloud Essentials program get 10 internal use rights (IURs) for Intune. By comparison, they get 250 IURs for the Business Productivity Online Suite and 250 IURs for Microsoft Dynamics CRM Online. Partners who meet some sales requirements reportedly get up to 25 Intune licenses, but even that is only 10 percent of the IURs for the more-established online products.

A generally glowing IDC white paper commissioned by Microsoft noted partner complaints about the small number of Intune IURs.

"Partners mentioned that Windows Intune is one of the (very few) Microsoft products for which they don't get a relatively large number of free Internal Use Rights seats," wrote IDC analyst Darren Bibby. "Partners pointed out that this discourages internal use and the hands-on experience that brings."

So we asked Microsoft what the thinking was behind limiting Intune to 10 IURs, and if there are any plans to increase the number.

A Microsoft spokesperson responded with this statement: "We have seen great interest in Windows Intune from our partners. Since Windows Intune is a new service, we set the IUR at 10 PCs

and as we get more data on the costs of operating the service, uptake of the offer and feedback from our partners, we may change it over time."

To be sure, 10 IURs is in line with the IURs in an Action Pack subscription, lower than the 25 normally granted for client products with silver competencies and much lower than the 100 generally granted with gold competencies. But that's on-premises thinking, and the relevant comparisons here are to the other Microsoft cloud products, which are being handed out, appropriately, like it's a fire sale.

Normally, Microsoft gets it when it comes to seeding the channel with products. Windows Intune has a very strong value proposition (See "Microsoft Gets Serious About MSPs," p. 9). But this is not a high-demand, established product, and many partners won't trust it until they've kicked the tires at some scale. The sooner the company removes that 10 IUR barrier, the better Intune's chances to get traction with the partner community will be.

Would you be more open to selling Windows Intune if you had more internal licenses to play with? Let me know your thoughts at sbekker@rcpmag.com. •

Building the engines of a Smarter Planet:

“IBM makes a constant effort to help the channel be more profitable.”

On a smarter planet, IBM Business Partners are capitalizing on more opportunities than ever before. For Sirius Computer Solutions, Inc., in San Antonio, Texas, that means being able to approach potential clients with solutions for entire business problems rather than just selling individual products. With the help of IBM, Sirius provides cloud solutions that transform a midsize company's fixed costs into variable costs, enabling flexible and more productive IT.

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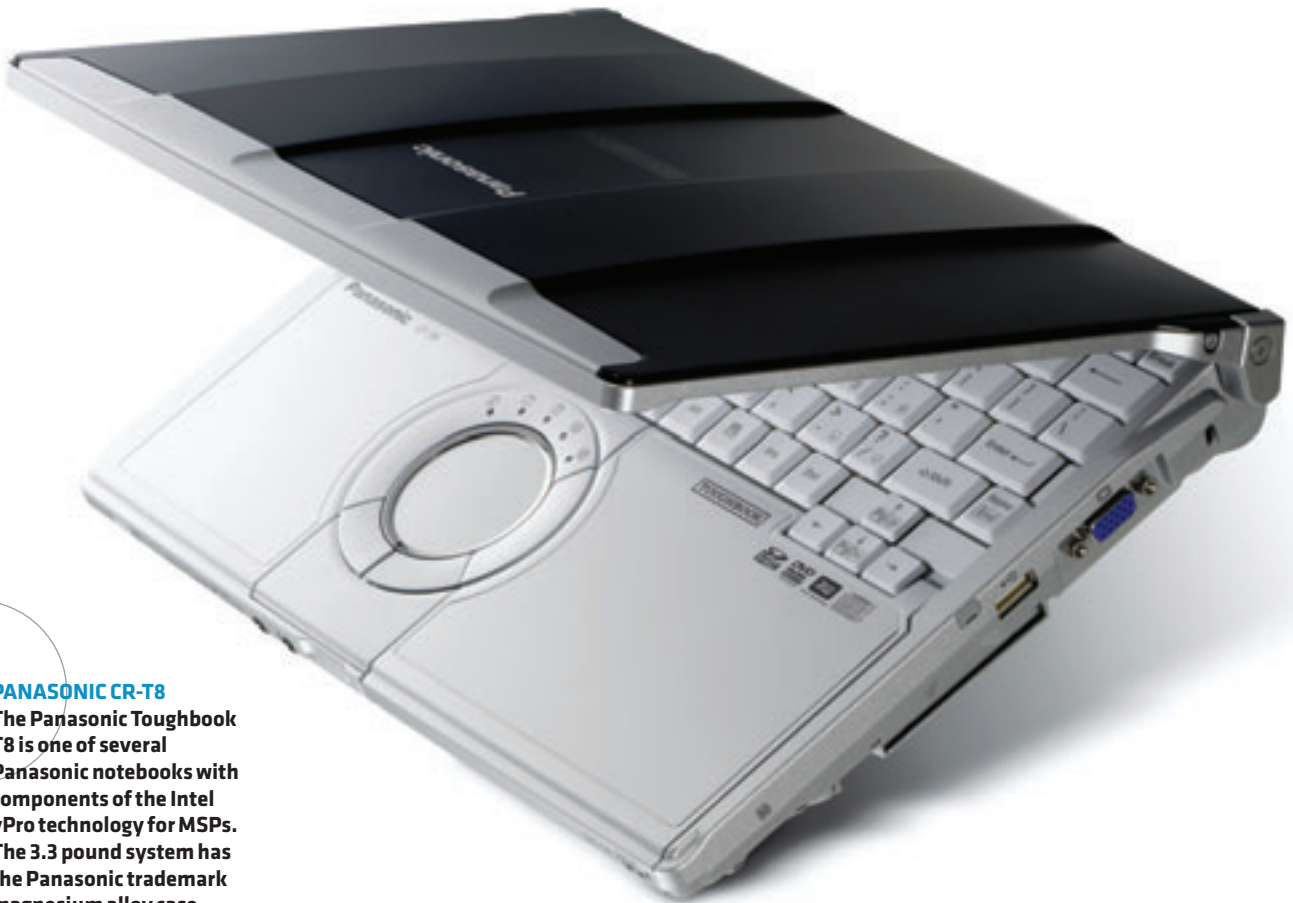
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PARTNER'S GUIDE TO MSP Hardware

Having the right hardware in place can make a big difference in keeping managed services provider-based costs down—and profits up. **By Scott Bekker**



● PANASONIC CR-T8

The Panasonic Toughbook T8 is one of several Panasonic notebooks with components of the Intel vPro technology for MSPs. The 3.3 pound system has the Panasonic trademark magnesium alloy case.

When it comes to managed services, the core business historically is managing servers. The industry grew up around taking the e-mail server and file server administration hassles away from small and midsize businesses (SMBs). A close second, however, is desktop management. The managed services provider (MSP) that can deliver a full package of remote IT management has an advantage among

customers looking to offload all IT functions and focus on their core businesses.

The importance of desktop management in the MSP world is also likely to increase. As cloud computing becomes more prevalent, the server management work could be a requirement for a shrinking number of MSP customers. SMBs are among the key customer groups for cloud-based e-mail, collaboration and communications packages from major vendors, such as Microsoft and Google Inc. Those packages become more sophisticated



WHO IS GEOFF BRADSHAW?

IT TECH, SUPERHERO,
INSPIRATION, LEGEND ...

DELL LATITUDE E4310

Dell categorizes its E4310 as an ultraportable laptop for executives or frequent travelers. The business focus also includes vPro technology. Despite its sleek appearance, the 3.4 pound E4310 incorporates many of Dell's ruggedized laptop features, such as the StrikeZone shock absorber and a Tri-Metal case.



every few months. With customers becoming more and more comfortable with putting their infrastructure in the cloud, fewer and fewer will want one or more servers in the back room, whether an MSP is managing the servers for them or not.

Even as Microsoft puts pressure on the server end of the MSP market, the company also recently released a cloud-based remote monitoring and management (RMM) tool, Windows Intune, that MSPs can use to manage and secure Windows-based desktops for customers.

“Without vPro, you’re using tools that operate at the OS level, and they just fail too easily.”

Luis Alvarez, President, Alvarez Technology Group Inc.

But the existing RMM tools still have several advantages for MSPs. First, Microsoft is still struggling with internal systems and internal politics that are both putting up barriers to allowing MSPs to directly bill their customers for Windows Intune. Without being able to bundle the billing for one part of their managed services offering (Windows Intune), moving to Microsoft’s RMM will be a non-starter for many MSPs. Second, while cloud computing threatens the future size of the server management market for MSPs, its effects so far are fairly minimal. As with most technologies, cloud computing right now looks as if it’s poised to take over every aspect of computing. Probably—again, as with most technologies—it will find a niche (possibly a rather large one) and leave many areas where on-premises servers, some managed by MSPs, will still make sense. Another key area where existing RMM

tools have a long lead on Windows Intune is in reaching below the level of the OS to manage desktop systems directly at the hardware level.

Intel vPro Aids MSPs

When Intel Corp. started rolling out the components of its vPro technology around 2007, the company changed the way laptop and desktop hardware became available to MSPs. While the technology is attractive to enterprise IT departments, its utility for MSPs was immediately obvious and Intel has marketed the technology aggressively for MSPs. Many MSPs jumped on vPro right away, and several RMM vendors made consoles available that leveraged some of the core capabilities of the Intel technology.

Intel vPro brought a lot of key capabilities for MSPs. It provided the ability for an MSP to see all the inventory at a customer site, a key component for asset management and software auditing. Where vPro changed the MSP business was in the ability to see systems that are powered off as well as those that are on. The technology allowed MSPs to remotely turn on systems that were powered off, as well as to remotely reboot a system from a different hard drive in case of problems. The capabilities greatly improved the effectiveness of late-night patch management and software updates, removing the requirements that users leave systems on and eliminating the need for a tech to stand in front of the machine to power it up. The capabilities also allowed for most troubleshooting, short of hardware failures, to occur remotely, reducing MSP costs in both travel and technician time. What the vPro hardware focus also eliminated were OS requirements—any OS that could run on the x86 hardware would be supported through the vPro remote-management tools. And running at the hardware layer, Intel vPro-based management didn’t require software agents at the OS level.



TOSHIBA PORTEGE M780

Another entry in the convertible notebook/tablet category with Intel vPro capabilities is the Toshiba Portege M780. In addition to touchscreen capabilities, the M780 sports a digital pen.

Second Generation of Intel Core vPro Processors

Meanwhile, Intel continues to invest in developing the vPro platform. In March, Intel unveiled a second generation of the Intel Core vPro processor family.

“The new Intel Core vPro processor family continues Intel’s advancement in performance, security and management,” Rick Echevarria, vice president, Intel Architecture Group, and general manager, Business Client Platform Division, said in a statement. “Possibly more critical, it readies businesses for major changes to come in such areas as desktop virtualization, cloud computing and the complementary relationship between PCs and the growing variety of other computing devices.”

One of the most intriguing features of the new vPro technology involves the way an MSP can help if a laptop is stolen. The new generation of Intel Core vPro processors includes Intel Anti-Theft Technology 3.0. According to Intel, previous versions allowed IT pros to send a “poison pill” to disable a lost or stolen computer over the Internet. The new version allows the poison pill to be sent as “an encrypted, authenticated SMS message by an authorized administrator over a 3G cellular network as well, within moments after a missing laptop is turned on.” A similar

message can reactivate the PC when it’s recovered. Another element of the platform is a Locator Beacon capability, which can help authorities track down a missing laptop if it has a 3G modem with GPS technology.

One other new theft security feature involves laptops stolen while in standby mode. “When awakened, the new standby protection feature can change normal procedure to require an encryption login, which is much more secure than the usual username and password,” according to the Intel news release about the vPro enhancements.

A few other capabilities of the new platform apply to MSPs. One is the Host-Based Configuration feature that automates the process of setting up vPro functions on new computers to the point where Intel says thousands of computers can be configured in a few minutes.

Intel also added a Keyboard-Video-Mouse (KVM) Remote Control capability. What’s different in the latest version is higher resolutions as technicians remotely view a user’s system, to accommodate the explosion of HD video and screen sizes in most desktop computing environments.

The latest generation of vPro chips also ramps up video capability, and Intel rightly points out that it’s not just so

employees can fool around and watch the latest YouTube sensation.

“To meet the growing dominance of video as the potential heir to traditional white papers, product briefs and slide presentations, the new processor family integrates Intel HD Graphics and advanced media processing into its entire line, eliminating the need for separate graphical processing units for performance-intensive graphical applications,” the Intel description of the new platform notes.

Meanwhile, other performance-enhancing technologies include Intel Turbo Boost Technology 2.0 and the new Intel Advanced Vector Extension (AVX). Intel and Microsoft both, with their PC legacy and PC revenues to protect, have been the biggest advocates of viewing the PC as the center of digital life, with other devices syncing and being managed by the PC. In a twist on the theme, Intel hinted that the performance enhancements and some new capabilities introduced in the new vPro platform may move that idea forward.

“This kind of performance equates to enormous promise for the PC, for example, as the ‘hub’ for the varied combination of tablets, smartphones, netbooks and operating systems filling our pockets and briefcases,” Echevarria said. “The new Core

vPro processor family has the capacity to offload tasks or—even better—share them to get the most from companion devices. With such performance, the PC could be a service provider, coordinating encryption, virus scanning, near-transparent syncs and remote control.”

Putting vPro into an MSP Business

Back in the MSP sphere, the vPro platform is not an off-the-shelf technology. The platform consists of five components. First is the Intel Core i5 vPro Processor or the Intel Core i7 vPro Processor. Then there’s the Intel chipset, the Intel network connection, the Intel firmware and an Intel vPro Technology-enabled management console application.

The management consoles are the element that brings it all together for MSPs and integrates the Intel vPro features with an RMM. Major RMM vendors with a vPro-specific console are Kaseya International Ltd., Level Platforms Inc. (LPI) and N-able Technologies Inc.

In a solution brief on the Level Platforms Managed Workplace 2010 RMM that integrates with the Intel technology, an LPI MSP, Alvarez Technology Group (ATG) Inc. of Salinas, Calif.,

- **LENOVO THINKPAD X201**
The Lenovo convertible notebook/tablet features a multi-touch screen and up to eight hours of battery life, in addition to the standard vPro technology capabilities.



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“[vPro] readies businesses for major changes to come in such areas as desktop virtualization, cloud computing and the complementary relationship between PCs and the growing variety of other computing devices.”

Rick Echevarria, Vice President, Intel Architecture Group

provided a comparison of common times to complete tasks with and without vPro.

According to the brief, ATG saw:

- * the average time to resolve a hardware problem drop from 118 minutes to 20 minutes
- * the average time to resolve a software problem drop from 25 minutes to 18 minutes
- * the average amount of downtime per PC per month fall from 30 minutes to 15 minutes
- * the number of desk-side visits per customer fall from eight to two

ATG also estimated a power cost savings of \$828 per PC over a three-year life span by using vPro-enabled technologies.

According to Luis Alvarez, president of Alvarez Technology Group, the hardware-interaction capabilities are key to reducing desktop visits.

“vPro-based PCs give the technicians more tools to solve problems more quickly,” Alvarez said in a case study. “Our target is to solve 90 percent of issues on the first call at the first level and avoid a second-level escalation and especially a third-level escalation, which is a site visit. Without vPro, you’re using tools that operate at the OS level, and they just fail too easily—a corrupted BIOS means you can’t do anything but go visit the machine. With vPro, we can connect to the machine, even if the OS is down, and get much more granular information without running a third-party tool. We can see what’s going on with the machine, rather than having to interpret what the user is telling us. The ability to boot to a CD-ROM elsewhere on the network is an amazing capability—we could do it before, but we had to jump through hoops and it wasn’t reliable.”

It’s not all rosy. Because the technology depends on several components, including integration with an RMM vendor’s tool, it’s not easy to mix and match systems. MSPs that want to use vPro among their clients will need to look carefully at the systems supported by their RMM vendor. Then, they’ll need to get customers to agree to the higher up-front costs of vPro-enabled desktops and laptops. Systems based on vPro technology will always be more expensive than the lowest-priced systems on the market. Another factor putting upward

pressure on vPro pricing is that the technology is Intel-only, not an industry-standard. The ROI case is pretty straightforward, but it will take some up-front work to get the numbers ready to make the benefits clear to potential customers. The lockstep requirement between hardware and different RMM consoles can also lead to challenges with system replacements when hardware fails between planned purchase cycles.

MSPs ready to take the plunge into vPro-enabled hardware have many laptop and desktop systems available to choose from, again given the caveat that the features are supported by the RMM vendor of choice.

Intel lists seven desktops that support the platform and 26 laptops. There are also six motherboards powering whitebox PCs with vPro technology inside.

Dell Inc. offers two desktops and three laptops with vPro technology. The desktops are the Optiplex 980 and Optiplex 780. The laptops are the Latitude E4310, Latitude E6410 and Latitude E6510.

Hewlett-Packard Co. also offers two desktops and has five laptops in its vPro portfolio. The desktops are the 8000 Elite and 8100 Elite. The laptops are the HP EliteBook 2740p, HP EliteBook 2540p, HP EliteBook 8440p/w, HP EliteBook 8540p/w and HP EliteBook 8740w.

Lenovo has one desktop—the ThinkCentre M90p—and six laptops. The laptops are the ThinkPad X201 Tablet, ThinkPad X301 Tablet, ThinkPad T410, ThinkPad T510, ThinkPad W510 and ThinkPad W710.

Acer Inc. offers two desktops and two laptops. The desktops are the Veriton 670G and Veriton M 67WS. Acer’s laptops are the TravelMate 6493 and TravelMate 6593.

Among laptop specialists, Toshiba America Inc. offers the Tecra M10, Tecra R10 and Portege M780 Tablet, while Panasonic Corp. includes vPro components in its CF-T8, CF-W8, CF-F8, CF-30Mk3, CF-19Mk3 and CF-52.

There are also whitebox PCs with vPro technology based on Intel and GIGABYTE motherboards. •

Scott Bekker (sbekker@1105media.com) is editor in chief of Redmond Channel Partner magazine.

{Cloud}

Microsoft Gets Serious About MSPs

After a slow start, the Windows Intune team seems to be concentrating their focus on managed services providers. **By Scott Bekker**

Microsoft is making an all-out effort to attract managed services providers (MSPs) to its new cloud-based Windows Intune platform, commissioning best practice guidance for partners from IDC and integrating with both major professional services automation platforms.

One of the big questions around Windows Intune was how serious Microsoft was about the MSP market. MSPs have never really had a specific landing place in the Microsoft Partner Network (MPN). Microsoft toyed with providing MSP tools in the past with a special version of System Center, but later backed away from that product. Even with Windows Intune, the MSP play seemed like an afterthought to a product intended for in-house IT departments, with Microsoft only adding the critical multiaccount console in the beta 2 release last July.

But with the Windows Intune launch at the recent Microsoft Management Summit, Microsoft showed it has been thinking carefully about what MSPs need to succeed with the tool.

“Based on partner requests, we’ve released guidance on how to integrate Windows Intune with commonly used professional software automation [PSA] tools like Autotask and ConnectWise,” wrote Gavriella Schuster on the Windows for Your Business Blog in the Windows Intune availability announcement.

In its own announcement of integration, ConnectWise called Windows Intune a remote management and monitoring service, which puts the Microsoft product in a category with tools from Kaseya International Ltd., Level Platforms Inc., N-able Technologies Inc., Zenith Infotech Ltd. and others.

The integration with ConnectWise creates an integrated workflow for problem alerting, tracking, remediation and some billing, according to ConnectWise CEO Arnie Bellini.

“We expect partners using Windows Intune to manage and maintain complicated PC infrastructures will realize greater



“MSPs have been early adopters of cloud computing, and Microsoft is to be commended for developing another [remote monitoring and management] tool for the ConnectWise community.”

Arnie Bellini, CEO, ConnectWise

efficiency, productivity and profitability thanks to this integration,” Bellini said in a statement. “MSPs have been early adopters of cloud computing, and Microsoft is to be commended for developing another [remote monitoring and management] tool for the ConnectWise community.”

Windows Intune is also “Ready-For-Autotask,” which the East Greenbush, N.Y.-based vendor defines as “third-party products that integrate with, and add value to, the Autotask platform.”

IDC channel analyst Darren Bibby interviewed a dozen partners in North America and Europe for the

{Cloud}

17-page, Microsoft-sponsored white paper, “The Windows Intune Partner Opportunity: A Blueprint for Success.” According to Bibby, nearly all partners interviewed for the project had a positive attitude about Intune.

“New opportunities include opening PC management to new markets, including smaller businesses that could not previously afford PC management; increasing deal size, particularly for businesses with large numbers of noncorporate attached PCs; and removing barriers to sales and adoption of PC management services,” Bibby wrote. “Further, included offerings like Windows 7 Enterprise upgrade rights and optional Microsoft Desktop Optimization Pack [MDOP] upgrade rights provide additional areas of opportunity. In fact, the partners who were able to venture an estimate projected that Windows Intune would help them grow their PC management businesses by an average of 19 percent over the first full year of operations.”

Some questions remain, and the IDC white paper outlined several. One is Microsoft’s direct billing approach, where partners receive partner-of-record fees, but the customer gets the bill directly from Microsoft. While it’s potentially a huge issue for MSPs, Microsoft executives are trying to deal with the issue across the company’s portfolio of cloud offerings and some sort of fix is widely anticipated after the Office 365 launch.

The billing issue aside, the other questions Bibby uncovered seem secondary (although see “Partners Will Need More Windows Intune Licenses,” p. 6, for more detail on one of them). The main question is whether Microsoft is really in the MSP market. The moves Microsoft has made since last summer suggest strongly that the answer is yes. •

Scott Bekker is editor in chief of RCP.



{MPN}

Microsoft Puts Dynamics Franchising Plan on Hold

A plan to allow large vertical partners to set up franchise arrangements for smaller partners won’t be happening in Microsoft FY 2012. **By Jeffrey Schwartz**

Microsoft has tabled a plan that would allow small Dynamics partners to become franchisees of larger integrators.

The company’s Dynamics channel team had been floating the idea in small public meetings for several months, as reported in the cover story of our April 2011 issue, “Can the Dynamics Channel Be Franchised?”

The plan would’ve invoked the model of a franchise such as McDonald’s as a way to enable small Dynamics partners to overcome some of the personnel requirements and other barriers that would prevent them from achieving gold competencies in Dynamics ERP or Dynamics CRM in the new Microsoft Partner Network (MPN).

Under the MPN, partners must have six people certified in either of the Dynamics competencies (ERP and CRM), and the base gold competency fees are double the old amounts for Gold Certified Partners. Microsoft executives touted franchising as a way to affiliate with larger partners without having to merge.

While the plan is on hold, Microsoft isn’t ruling out revisiting it at some point in the future, but certainly not before the beginning of the next fiscal year, said Kristi Hofer, U.S. partner channel manager for the Microsoft Dynamics organization.

“I wouldn’t say it’s dead,” Hofer said. “Microsoft still thinks there’s a possibility to be able to launch a franchise model. I’d just say we haven’t quite figured out what the model should be yet, so we’re just re-looking at a lot of different aspects.”

Hofer said Microsoft will revisit the requirements of the model it presented. “We just aren’t confident it’s at a point right now that we could launch it and be successful for the channel,” she said. “I do think the franchise model would work within the Dynamics channel. I think we just have to get the formula right.” •

Jeffrey Schwartz is executive editor of Redmond Channel Partner magazine.

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{RCP on the WPC}



11 Things to Know About ... WPC 2011 Sessions

By Scott Bekker/RCP Staff

The Microsoft Worldwide Partner Conference (WPC) in Los Angeles is just two months away. We've checked out the early list of sessions, and here are a few of the more interesting ones.

1 "Deep Dive: Crescent." Crescent is a new business intelligence (BI) interactive visualization tool for business users. Live data linked through PowerPoint in a feature called Storyboarding? Pretty cool.

2 "Deep Dive: The Value of SQL Server Denali in Large Accounts." The session description promises: "Several demos and no marketing."

3 "Scaling Your Database in the Cloud: SQL Azure." According to the description, the session will look at real-world situations and cover tuning for experience and performance. Time permitting, the session may also touch on the new reporting capabilities in SQL Azure.

4-7 "Seizing the Business Mobility Opportunity with Windows Phone." An introductory class in the Windows Phone track, Microsoft is expecting the session to be so popular that the company has scheduled it twice. This is one of many

sessions on Windows Phone already on the agenda. Other interesting titles include "Grow Your SharePoint and Exchange Business with Windows Phone," "The 5 Things You Need to Know About Developing Successful Windows Phone Solutions" and "Best Practices to Take to Market and Monetize Your Windows Phone Solution."

8 "Industry: Disrupt, Compete and Succeed by Enabling LOB Solutions and Applications in the Cloud with Windows Azure!" For some partners,

"disrupt" is a scary word. For others, it's an exciting word. Both groups might want to hit this session.

9 "IW: Delivering the Future of Productivity to Your Customers with Microsoft Office 365." Looks like a good entry-level session for partners who haven't started selling Microsoft's cloud offerings yet (which would be most partners).

10 "Server & Tools: Making It Rain with Clouds." The topic is partner profitability with full cloud solutions on Microsoft infrastructure products, System Center and private cloud. The session description adds: "We'll explore the benefits of obtaining a gold competency in Cloud or Virtualization." There is no Cloud competency yet. Typo or leak?

11 "IW: Introducing Microsoft Lync." A U.S. Partner track course on the follow-on product to Microsoft Office Communications Server. More information about the sessions scheduled is available at digitalwpc.com.



JULIE BENNANI

On Places for Small Partners in the MPN

Intro: One of the complaints Microsoft partner executives tackled during the Microsoft Partner Network (MPN) Interactive Leadership Forum in March was the widespread concern that Microsoft is leaving smaller partners behind with the new MPN. Julie Bennani, general manager of the MPN, had this response:

"If you look at a lot of our competitors and what they're doing as far as how they qualify partners, we're very smaller-partner friendly. The requirements from our competitors—being Oracles and Ciscos, etc.—are significantly different and don't really balance that appreciation, I think, for our smaller partners."

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Cost is always a factor so it pays to leverage partnerships for maximum return on investment for all stakeholders.

By Jabulani Leffall

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An economic downturn, larger business trends, gluts in supply and contractions in investment can affect any and all business from the smallest to the largest—sometimes adversely.

Nowhere is this apparent than in the state of Michigan—home to America’s largest automakers—where even the smallest hiccup can reverberate in segments that seemingly have nothing to do with cars, such as IT services.

“Fifteen percent unemployment is nothing to take lightly,” explains Mike Ritsema, owner and managing partner of Western-Michigan based tech solutions provider i3 Business Solutions. “It’s a good thing for the auto bailout and the quick turnaround in the Chrysler and bankruptcy proceedings that things aren’t worse and also a good thing that Grand Rapids is in the western part of the state and better off than most areas.”

Yet and still, cost, especially in leaner times is always a factor, says Ritsema, who along with partner Kathy Labozzetta runs the 18 year-old IT service, consultancy and support business as a tight ship.

The company offers network, technology implementation and main-

tenance services, managed enterprise services and Web application integration.

What can help defray these costs for companies such as i3 and the clients they serve is partnerships, either through channel links, joint ventures or service level agreements. This is what i3 prides itself on.

It is partnered up with the biggest names in the industry as a Microsoft Certified Gold Partner and Certified Business Solution Partner, VMware Enterprise Partner, an IBM Premier Business and Dell Certified Partner and a Symantec Partner among others.

But perhaps the most progressive partnership, Ritsema opines, has been Zenith Infotech, which, interestingly enough Ritsema discovered not through well thought-out due diligence or comprehensive requests for proposals but through none other than yet another partner in Heartland Technology Group, which is part of a trade association of other managed service providers Ritsema is involved in.

“Three or four years ago we invested money in managed services and in the case of Zenith we just sort of found each other,” Ritsema recalls.

“And then so they come in with a monthly services plan, which was a big plus for us cost wise and we have an automatic support team through them.”

Ritsema says more than 90 percent of his managed services business segment is deployed using Zenith services. The company leverages Zenith’s Back up and Disaster Recovery Solution as well as server and desktop support services.

“What happened really when we first went into managed services was that I was attending peer groups and was looking at how to shore up profits through managed services,” said Ritsema. “Once we got on board with Zenith and they got on board with us and things sort of gel, we started to grow and I can say now that our managed services segment is the most profitable and predictable part of our business and you know what, I like profitable and predictable.”

Since IT operations is an always necessary but rarely revenue-driven segment of an individual enterprise, Ritsema says he prides himself on holding his company and more than 25 in-house staffers accountable for “quantifying and measuring the cost savings, business productivity gains,” as well as sales and customer service growth and development in determining the return on investment for every IT resource planning dollar spent at each of his clients.

Ritsema is not alone in this assertion, saying that his peers are aware that return on investment isn’t always through dollar-for-dollar measurement but through efficiency that allows clients to think of IT as a seamless and operative complement rather than a huge technology expense.

“I think Managed services in general is a growing trend and will be profitable as it evolves and gets more competitive,” he said. “Certainly competitors are cropping up everywhere because the opportunities are so vast.”

“...our managed services segment is the most profitable and predictable part of our business and you know what, I like profitable and predictable.”

Certainly, a recent research report from telecom and software support consultancy Ovum—a report commissioned by Cisco Systems—supports Ritsema’s assertion.

The study, recently predicted, based on respondent sampling that that the global market for managed services in myriad industry and sector verticals would reach revenues of \$66 billion by 2012.

The study called upon approximately 1,300 enterprise managed service users in about 14 different countries.

With the advent of virtualization technology, the shift to hosted services almost seems inevitable as internal costs would likely exceed the benefits of maintaining in-house staff at even the smallest companies, Ritsema said.

“Plus what we’re doing is driving service solutions from the stand point of service level agreements as opposed to hourly project billing,” he said. “What Zenith, for instance, allows us to do deliver the solution with a reliability and quality that leads to customer satisfaction.”

When customers are satisfied and costs are down everyone’s happy, said Ritsema, even in uncertain times.

“In this economy, particularly in the state of Michigan it’s been a rough

ride, but we’re focusing on the positives and focusing on the future, while being mindful of the present and the opportunities it presents.”

Ritsema knows as well as anyone that so goes the local economy, so goes local businesses and that can be in either direction depending on many factors, some of which are beyond his control. What Ritsema can control, he says, is his service rollouts and how they are presented as value-added propositions to clients with the knowledge that low cost and high efficiency are the ideal tandem given the fiscal climate many are facing in his home state of Michigan and elsewhere.

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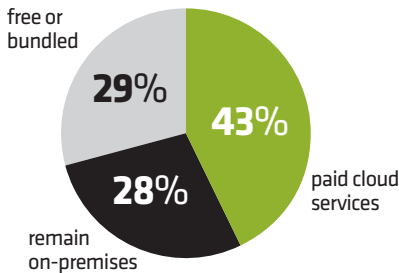
{SMB}

Survey Shows Cloud Usage Will Rise

A Microsoft-sponsored survey of 3,258 companies with 250 or fewer people found that 39 percent plan to use paid cloud services in the next three years.

Great (Cloud) Expectations

According to Microsoft's survey of SMBs, within three years workloads will be:



SOURCE: MICROSOFT SMB CLOUD ADOPTION STUDY 2011

Small and midsize businesses (SMBs) are strong candidates to extend their use of cloud-computing services over the next three years, according to a recent Microsoft study.

Based on a survey conducted by Edge Strategies for Microsoft, of 3,258 companies employing 250 or fewer people, 39 percent of SMBs plan to use paid cloud services. This is up from 29 percent today, suggesting a 34 percent increase.

"What that's telling us is SMBs are starting to understand the value proposition of what it means to have certain workloads hosted or offered through a remote solution versus having it on their premises," said Monish Sood, marketing manager for Microsoft's communications sector.

The larger the company, the more likely it is to use paid cloud services. Of those companies with 51 to 250 employees, 56 percent said they'll use paid cloud services, while 81 percent will use any type of cloud services (paid or free). By comparison, 37 percent of small companies with two to 10 employees will be using paid cloud services in three years.

Among the most widely used hosted services are accounting and payroll, e-mail and collaboration. Currently, 14 percent of those surveyed said they use a hosted accounting and payroll service. That figure will increase to 20 percent in three years. Hosted e-mail accounted for 10 percent of current users, a figure that will jump to 14 percent in three years, and collaboration will escalate from 8 percent today to 17 percent.

Other services that are expected to show significant gains include data archiving and compliance services, which will grow from 5 percent to 13 percent; traditional file data storage and backup, set to grow from 8 percent to 15 percent; CRM, rising from 7 percent to 14 percent; Web conferencing, increasing from 7 percent to 13 percent; and file sharing, growing from 5 percent to 11 percent.

Traditional IT services will still remain dominant in three years, according to 52 percent of those surveyed, while 30 percent will use free services, and 17 percent will use paid offerings. Only 33 percent will only use a traditional e-mail client, compared with 26 percent who will use a browser, and 40 percent using multiple methods to access messages.

The primary reason SMBs are attracted to cloud services is that software will be up-to-date, according to 77 percent responding, with 71 percent saying access from any device anywhere is the second-most appealing reason. Cost came in third, with 63 percent saying the ability to save money is a key factor, and 49 percent saying that cloud offerings provide access to services they couldn't get in-house. • —J.S.



Top 10 BPOS Partners

Leaked list shows CDW on top of Microsoft cloud suite sales.

{Velocity}

Wondering how much business top Microsoft cloud partners are doing? A list leaked to the channel blog site Talkin' Cloud in March showed the top 10 U.S. partners by the number of Microsoft Business Productivity Online Suite (BPOS) deals they'd deployed. Microsoft declined to comment. We checked the list with one of the companies on it, and a source confirmed that the numbers looked right for the end of calendar year 2010.

The top 10 partners on the list are:

1. CDW LLC with 390 customers
2. LiveOffice LLC with 125
3. StrategicSaaS LLC with 95
4. MessageOps with 85
5. Cloud Strategies LLC with 75
6. (tie) Software House International Corp. with 70
6. (tie) SoftChoice Corp. with 70
6. (tie) Vorsite Corp. with 70
9. Dell Inc. with 65
10. Champion Solutions Group with 65

—S.B.

What Is Windows Thin PC?

- * Windows Thin PC (WinTPC) is a locked-down version of Windows 7 that makes it easier to turn old PCs into thin clients.
- * It's a successor to Windows Fundamentals for Legacy PCs.
- * WinTPC is part of the Microsoft Virtual Desktop Infrastructure initiative.

{ Thin Client }

Microsoft Windows Thin PC CTP Goes Public

The release should help customers turn junky old PCs into usable thin-client machines running locked-down Windows 7. **By Kurt Mackie**

A public community technology preview (CTP) of Microsoft Windows Thin PC (WinTPC) software technology is now available.

Microsoft describes WinTPC as a "locked-down version of Windows 7" that lets companies reuse their PCs, including older units, as thin clients. WinTPC is the Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) follow-up to Microsoft Windows Fundamentals for Legacy PCs solution, based on Windows XP SP3.

The WinTPC solution will be available to customers with the Software Assurance (SA) licensing option in place. SA is an added licensing cost that provides educational resources and no-cost software upgrades within the specific contract interval.

However, while users must have SA to use WinTPC, the CTP will

be open to all to try. One of the benefits of using WinTPC for thin clients is that it doesn't require organizations to sign up for a Windows Virtual Desktop Access (VDA) license. The VDA license is an extra cost for thin-client Windows users because, according to the Microsoft licensing scheme, the use of thin clients for VDI deployments isn't included as a benefit of SA licensing.

WinTPC will tap Microsoft RemoteFX technology, which is incorporated into Windows Server 2008 R2 SP1, to enable a rich graphics experience on a remotely hosted desktop. Microsoft has typically said that RemoteFX runs applications with its Aero UI, which was first introduced in Windows Vista. RemoteFX also can support intense graphics, such as computer-aided design (CAD) drawing

programs, on thin clients, Microsoft claims.

Users will also be able to use System Center Configuration Manager to deploy WinTPC images and manage those virtual desktops. Microsoft also added Write Filter support with this CTP release. The Write Filter support is a security measure that can help organizations better manage the security of endpoint devices.

Hewlett-Packard Co. and Wyse Technology Inc. are working on new thin-client devices based on the Windows Embedded OSes, but Microsoft is claiming that older "legacy" PCs and devices can be used with WinTPC. The options include using devices with lower RAM and CPU capacity. *

Kurt Mackie is the online news editor for the 1105 Enterprise Computing Group.



Karl Noakes, general manager of partner strategy and programs in the Microsoft Worldwide Partner Group (WPG)

{ Customers }

Microsoft Pinpoint Heading for a Million Leads?

WPG executive says Microsoft is continuing to invest in its customer-facing partner directory.

In a recent Microsoft Partner Network Interactive Leadership Forum with 500 partners, Microsoft executives shared progress numbers that suggest the company's steady focus on the Pinpoint partner directory is starting to pay dividends for partners.

"This year we set ourselves a fairly aggressive target to generate 700,000 leads for partners through Pinpoint. We're very pleased with the progress. We're expecting to exit our financial year above that," Karl Noakes, general manager of partner strategy and programs in the Microsoft Worldwide Partner Group (WPG), said during the March event.

According to a chart that Noakes referred to in the forum, Pinpoint delivered 270,000 prospects to partners in FY 2010 (July 2009-June 2010). So far, the lead-generation directory has produced 642,000 prospects to partners this fiscal year with several months remaining.

Going forward, the projections get more ambitious. Noakes said the projection for FY 2012, which starts this July, will be 1.25 million leads.

"[Where we are is] just a start," Noakes said. "As Pinpoint starts to become more pervasive in our marketing, then we hope to drive more customer traffic to that." *

—S.B.

{Licensing}



'To the Cloud,' Microsoft Says of Software Assurance Benefits

Changes coming in July will make it possible for customers to extend licensing benefits from their application server products to the cloud if they shift their environments.

Microsoft is planning some licensing changes that it says would benefit its Software Assurance (SA) customers and service provider partners.

For volume licensing customers with the SA option in place, the changes would make it easier to move to the cloud and retain those SA benefits. The company calls this benefit "license mobility."

Additionally, Microsoft is planning to implement changes to the Service Provider Licensing Agreement (SPLA) that are designed to reduce costs for Microsoft hosting partners.

Changes for both programs will take effect worldwide on July 1.

The license mobility option for volume licensing customers with SA will extend to the following Microsoft application server products: Microsoft Exchange Server, Microsoft Dynamics CRM, Microsoft Lync Server, Microsoft SharePoint Server, Microsoft SQL Server and Microsoft System Center.

A Microsoft spokesperson indicated via

e-mail that the license mobility concept just applies to Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) for hosted application server workloads. Hosted Windows is part of the service purchased from Microsoft or its hosting partners and is covered under the SPLA.

"With License Mobility, service providers can now have a shared hardware infrastructure upon which they run a variety of services, for example: hosting (SPLA), outsourcing, mobility, their own internal use workloads, without having to segment the datacenter in hardware or licensing silos, all of which are a key benefit for partners," the spokesperson said.

"I do think that this [announcement by Microsoft] does answer at least some questions for enterprises about the viability of the licenses they buy today in a cloud-based world," said Christopher Voce, a senior analyst at Forrester Research Inc.

Microsoft also announced that it has reduced Windows Server costs under its

SPLA program for its hosting partners. The cost reductions come from "retiring all Outsourcing SKUs, eliminating use restrictions for Non-Outsourcing SKUs and adding the Core Infrastructure Suite to the SPLA program."

The Core Infrastructure Suite will include Windows Server Datacenter, System Center Server Management Suite Datacenter and Forefront Endpoint Protection. Microsoft says that its hosting partners will see cost reductions after it eliminates all Windows Server Outsourcing SKUs in July. A single Non-Outsourcing SKU "will cover all scenarios currently covered by both SKUs," the spokesperson explained. *

—K.M.

{Bundles}

Change Coming to Core CALs

Microsoft will alter packaging and pricing in August.

License mobility and SPLA price reductions aren't the only changes coming to Microsoft licensing this summer. In August, Microsoft will change its Client Access License (CAL) packages and prices.

Effective Aug. 1, the following features will be supported in the Core CAL, priced at \$89 per user or device:

- * Windows Server CAL
 - * System Center Configuration Manager
 - * SharePoint Standard CAL
 - * Exchange Standard CAL
 - * Lync Standard CAL *
 - * Forefront Endpoint Protection *
- At the same time, the Enterprise CAL will be priced at \$86 per user or device, and will contain the following components:**
- * Active Directory RMS
 - * Forefront Unified Access Gateway
 - * Forefront Protection Suite
 - * System Center Client Management Suite
 - * SharePoint Enterprise CAL
 - * Exchange Enterprise CAL
 - * Lync Enterprise CAL

* New: Moved from Enterprise CAL

—K.M.

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We size up the devices that Microsoft is hoping will carry its Windows Phone 7 platform—to relevance or better—in the fast-moving smartphone market.
By Keith Ward

The smartphone market is a rough-and-tumble place right now, and separating the pretenders from the contenders is getting easier. Android and iPhone devices are snarling and landing roundhouse blows on the likes of BlackBerry- and webOS-based smartphones.



Now, following the timely retirement of Windows Mobile, into the ring steps Windows Phone 7, Microsoft's next-generation challenger. Redmond hopes to turn this into a three-man fight, but early returns are mostly neutral. Windows Phone 7 devices have been well-reviewed, although initial sales aren't what Microsoft had hoped for.



But we're in the first few rounds of this battle royale, and Windows Phone 7 still has more than a puncher's chance. For instance, as of this March, the Windows Phone 7 Marketplace had eclipsed 10,000 apps—figures that not even the iPhone and Android app stores reached in the same time frame. That's encouraging news for Redmond, as apps are largely what drive smartphone sales.



There's a similar growing ecosystem of Windows Phone 7 devices available. If your customers are interested in Windows Phone 7, guiding them to the right device requires knowledge of all the smartphones in major carrier stores. Let's see how the challengers stack up against each other.

SAMSUNG FOCUS

When buying a smartphone, what you naturally see first is the screen. And the screen is the chief selling point of the Samsung Focus.

The Focus uses a Super Active Matrix OLED (AMOLED) screen. Super AMOLED screens are brighter, sharper, use less power and are easier to see in direct sunlight. They also just look great—in a review, Gizmodo says, “If you’re going to get a Windows Phone, this is the one to stare at the hardest.” It’s the only contender in this fight that has one.

The Focus is 4.8 inches long and 2.5 inches wide, with a weight of just about 4 oz. This makes it one of the smallest and lightest Windows Phone 7 contenders. The display itself is 4 inches wide, at a resolution of 800 x 480.

For picture-takers, the Focus features a 5 megapixel camera with a 4x digital zoom. This phone, however, is limited on how many photos and videos it can store; built-in storage is a stingy 8GB, which is pretty outdated these days. Samsung said in a chat with users that storage can be expanded up to 32GB with an SD card (the company also noted that swapping out cards resets the phone). RAM checks in at 512MB.

Samsung says the Focus battery should provide up to 300 hours of standby time and 6.5 hours of talk time. And, as always, these statements should come with a “your mileage may vary” sticker.

AT&T is the sole U.S. carrier for the Focus. The smartphone will set you back \$99 with a two-year contract; the minimum data plan available (as with all these phones, a data plan is required) runs \$15 per month.



HTCARRIVE

One of the newest entries is the HTC Arrive. The primary distinguishing trait of the Arrive, as far as the HTC lineup is concerned, is the slide-out keyboard. Not only does the keyboard slide out, but once it’s fully extended, the display tilts up for a comfortable viewing angle.

One drawback to note with this setup is that the Windows Phone 7 OS does much of its displaying in portrait mode only; thus, images like the home screen appear sideways when the Arrive is configured this way.

On the other hand, the Arrive comes with one big advantage: the so-called “NoDo” update, which includes the much-anticipated cut-and-paste functionality. Reviews on how well this works in version 1 are mixed; there’s no doubt, however, that it’s a welcome addition to the OS.

Under the hood, the Arrive is like most of the other contenders here: 1GHz processor, 576MB of RAM and 16GB of built-in storage. The dimensions are 4.6 x 2.3 inches, with a weight of 6.4 oz., making it relatively heavy. That partly accounts for the cramped, 3.6 inch 800 x 480 screen; making it much bigger would result in an elephantine phone.

The camera and video capabilities are in line with other Windows Phone 7 devices, offering a 5 megapixel camera capable of shooting HD-quality video.

The Arrive is the first Windows Phone 7 phone offered by Sprint. It went on sale March 20, at a price of \$199 with a new activation and two-year hitch.



HTC HD7

HTC Corp. makes more Windows Phone 7 smartphones than anyone else. And its HD7 is the biggest of those phones—in fact, it's the biggest Windows Phone 7 device out there. At 4.8 x 2.68 inches, it'll take up more room in your pocket than any other contender in this roundup. On the plus side, that roominess allows it to fit a 4.3 inch display, nearly a full inch larger than the LG Quantum (resolution is the standard 800 x 480). Because the Windows Phone 7 OS can use a lot of real estate, that can be an advantage.

The HD7 also offers something unusual: a kickstand that flips out from the back, allowing it to sit at an easy viewing angle on a table, for example.

On the hardware side, the HD7 offers the same 1GHz "Snapdragon" processor that's standard on most of these phones. It has 16GB of built-in storage and 576MB of RAM. A 5 megapixel camera and high-definition video camera (1280 x 720) should satisfy point-and-shoot types.

Some reviews have complained about the small battery of the HD7. Most reviewers ran out of power before a full day's usage. It's odd that HTC would put an underpowered battery in a phone with such a large display.

The HD7 is available on the T-Mobile network (which may be AT&T when you read this, as the acquisition of T-Mobile by AT&T broke at press time) for \$199 with a two-year commitment.

HTC SURROUND

The name of this HTC phone tells you what feature it promotes above all others. It's all about the sound, which is provided by a speaker hidden under the phone—when you slide it out the bottom, as you would a physical keyboard, you get a long, thin speaker instead. At one end is a button that, when pressed, adds "surround sound" to the experience.

Given this phone's major selling point is the speaker, it's worth noting that reviews generally said the speaker was disappointing. Most didn't notice much difference between the Surround and other Windows Phone 7 devices in terms of the external sound. This is due more to the tiny size of the speaker, rather than any design flaw on the part of HTC—you're simply not going to get good sound out of a speaker that small.


The Surround also comes with a kickstand, similar to its HD7 sibling. The physical dimensions are 4.7 x 2.42 inches, and a 3.8 inch display with a resolution of 800 x 400, putting it squarely in the middle of the pack.

The power behind the phone is a 1GHz processor, with a somewhat skimpy 448MB of RAM and 16GB of storage. The camera is the standard 5 megapixels, and video can be shot in HD at 1280 x 720 pixels.

Like the LG Quantum, AT&T is giving away the Surround for free with a two-year commitment of at least \$15 per month for data.



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LG QUANTUM

Those who just can't get the hang of an onscreen keyboard will want to look at the LG Quantum, which sports a full QWERTY slide-out keyboard.

The Quantum, an AT&T offering, is larger and heavier than most of the contenders here, at 4.7 x 2.3 inches and more than 6 oz. This is undoubtedly due to the keyboard. Reviews of the keyboard generally give it high marks for the large, easy-to-use keys. Of course, there's a virtual keyboard if you don't feel like sliding out the physical one.

Inside, the Quantum features a 1GHz Qualcomm chip, 16GB of built-in storage and 256MB of RAM. The display is 3.5 inches at 800 x 480 resolution, and a standard thin-film transistor screen, which means it won't be as sharp as the Super AMOLED display found on models like the Samsung Focus.

The camera is 5 megapixels with auto-focus and has a built-in flash in addition to a nice 5x zoom; it also shoots video.

LG lists a battery time of 350 hours on standby, and six hours of talk time. At press time, the phone was free from AT&T with a two-year contract and \$15-per-month minimum data service.

DELL VENUE PRO

The Dell Venue Pro is Dell Inc.'s first Windows Phone 7 device, and offers something unique in the category: a slide-out keyboard with portrait orientation. The keyboard slides down out of the bottom, which takes better advantage of the predominantly portrait orientation of Windows Phone 7.

Like all slide-out keyboards in this roundup, it's a full QWERTY keyboard, with the Windows Phone 7 virtual keyboard also available.

The Venue Pro tends to be on the large side: 4.76 x 2.54 inches, and weighing in at a hefty 6.74 oz. It also features a large, 4.1 inch AMOLED screen. AMOLED screens use less energy than normal displays and have high refresh rates, but they can be hard to see in direct sunlight. Because they're a generation older than the Super AMOLED screens, they won't be quite as sharp, but compared to non-AMOLED displays, they really pop.

Inside the phone, it's the same specs as the other phones, with a 1GHz processor, 512MB of RAM, and 8GB or 16GB storage. The camera specs similarly mirror the other contenders: 5 megapixels and HD video at 1280 x 720.

Dell offers tiered pricing plans for the Venue Pro, for which T-Mobile is the U.S. carrier: \$99 for the 8GB model and \$149 for the 16GB version, both needing the two-year commitment. Interestingly, T-Mobile doesn't sell the phone directly—it's only available from Dell.



COURTESY OF DELL INC.

DECISION POINTS

Microsoft has wisely required Windows Phone 7 OEM partners to meet minimum hardware specs, so the experience of using the underlying OS should be similar; some phones have a bit snappier response than others, but for the most part there won't be huge variations in user experience from phone to phone.

Some of the most common decision points will revolve around items like a physical versus virtual keyboard, screen size, size, weight and battery life. Windows Phone 7 takes a middle ground between Android and iPhone devices: it allows for more variation than the one-size-fits-all iPhone, but not as much as the huge array of Android handsets.

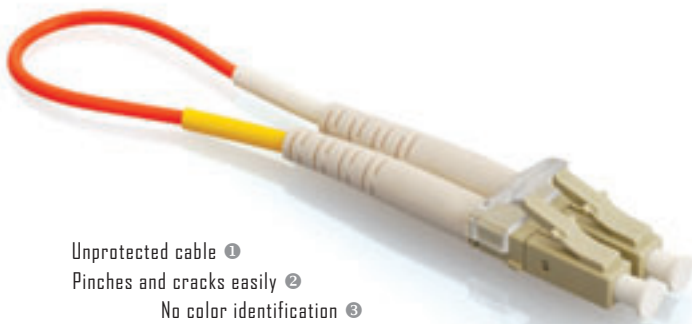
Currently, OEMs aren't rushing new Windows Phone 7 devices to market at the rate that they're producing Android phones. Much of that is undoubtedly due to a "wait and see" attitude until more market data is available—if, and when, Windows Phone 7 sales start taking off, more phones will surely follow. In the meantime, the present lineup offers enough variety of features, functions and price points to make them viable options for your business. •

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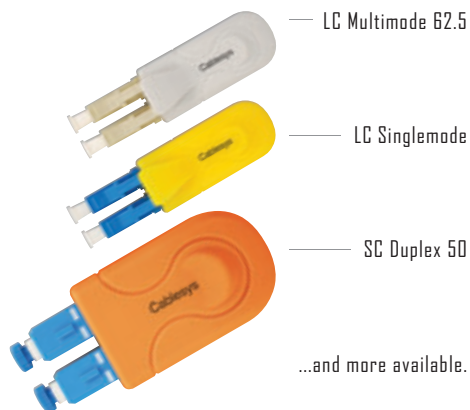
Now



- Unprotected cable ①
- Pinches and cracks easily ②
- No color identification ③
- Stiff thumb release ④
- Long body ⑤
- Flimsy and hard to handle ⑥
- Difficult to store ⑦



- Protective case ①
- Ergonomic design ②
- Color-coded identification ③
- Flexible thumb release ④
- Compact body ⑤
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Inside the Crowd ▶

RCP reports on what Microsoft's Most Valuable Professionals discussed at the new MVP Nation conference in March. **By Rich Freeman**

Amy Babinchak



Michael Cocanower



Shane Young



Chad Mosman



Dave Sobel



E

very year, some 1,500 Microsoft Most Valuable Professionals (MVPs) gather near Redmond for the MVP Global Summit, three days of pep talks and product updates from Microsoft employees. This year, nearly a hundred of them took a short detour on the way home: The first annual MVP Nation conference, held March 3 and 4 in downtown Seattle.

Selected by Microsoft for their technical proficiency and active participation in newsgroups, online forums and user groups, MVPs are some of the most knowledgeable authorities on Microsoft solutions not employed by Microsoft itself. MVP Nation, meanwhile, was staged by SMB Nation Inc., the Bainbridge Island, Wash.-based company best known for its semi-annual events targeting channel partners who support small and midsize businesses (SMBs). According to Harry Brelsford, the company's CEO, the new show was designed to help partners, IT managers from the SMB market and vendors of SMB-oriented technologies get face time with people to whom they rarely have direct access.

e Cool

The Microsoft MVP, or Most Valuable Professional, logo is a badge of honor in the IT world. In the Microsoft channel, the badge is something more—it signifies a champion within a partner company that helps the entire firm establish its market credibility. About 1,000 MVPs worldwide are Microsoft partners. RCP editors have selected the top 10 U.S.-based MVPs for 2011. These are experts whose status as MVPs has an impact on their partner companies' ability to win business. See profiles of RCP's top Microsoft partner MVPs throughout this article.

Mike Snyder

Mark Polino

Charles Allen

Dan Holme

Dan English



“The MVPs are the subject-matter experts regarding Microsoft products, and the public would like to hear from them,” Brelsford says.

So what do Microsoft's top independent ambassadors to the global IT community talk about when almost no one from Microsoft is around to listen? The cloud, of course.

“It's forcing all of us to look at our business as if we're in a different world,” said Jeff Middleton, an MVP focused on the Microsoft Small Business Server (SBS) product and founder of SBSmigration.com, a Web site offering advice and tools for performing SBS upgrades.

Indeed, attendees had plenty of questions for MVP presenters like Middleton on Microsoft's new wave of cloud-based offerings. “One of the big challenges for partners is,

how do I make money off this?” observed Chad Mosman, an Office 365 MVP and principal consultant at MessageOps, a Microsoft Small Business Specialist in Charlotte, N.C., that helps SMBs migrate onto Microsoft Business Productivity Online Suite (BPOS). Office 365, the soon-to-be-released successor to BPOS, offers some tantalizing hints, Mosman noted. With prices topping out at \$10 per user per month and partners collecting just 6 percent of that after the first year, BPOS can be a disappointing source of incremental income. By supplementing BPOS with both on-premises and Web-based versions of Microsoft Office, however, Office 365 offers more attractive economics.

“You start getting up into the \$25 to \$30 per-user per-month range, which then translates into higher partner



RCP Top Microsoft Partner MVPs

fees,” Mosman told a somewhat skeptical audience. “You can turn that into a pretty decent stream of recurring revenue.”

Same goes for selling SBS 2011 Essentials and Windows Storage Server 2008 R2 Essentials, two cloud-friendly products for companies with up to 25 users that shipped a few weeks after MVP Nation’s conclusion. The first system combines on-site backup, remote access and file-sharing functionality with connections to Software as a Service (SaaS) applications from Microsoft and other providers. The second enables SMBs to create a simple, centralized storage repository, and is designed for use with network-attached storage systems from third-party OEMs.

Contrary to the concerns of some conference attendees, neither product cannibalizes existing revenue streams, according to Steven Banks, an SBS MVP and president of Banks Consulting Northwest Inc., a Microsoft Small Business Specialist in Port Orchard, Wash. “Look at this as a way to expand your customer base,” he said. “The on-premises solutions are there. They’re not going anywhere.”

Conference attendee Bob Nitrio wasn’t so sure. Nitrio is CEO of Ranvest Associates, an IT consultancy and Microsoft Small Business Specialist in Orangevale, Calif. “It’s still viable,” he said of the on-site version of SBS, but he believes that, within a few years, plenty of SMBs will be doing all of their computing in the cloud, leaving SBS resellers without cloud skills high and dry. [See “SBS 2011,” p. 33, for more on what the on-premises and cloud offerings mean for partners—Ed.]

A HEALTHY COMMUNITY

Of course, cloud computing wasn’t the only topic of interest at MVP Nation. According to Brelsford, attendees also gave high marks to a session on Microsoft Windows MultiPoint Server 2011, an on-premises solution that lets a single PC support multiple users, each with their own monitor and keyboard. Aimed at the education vertical, where budgets are slim and students plentiful, MultiPoint Server can also be a cost-effective option for small businesses with simple computing needs.

Other sessions covered partnering-related subjects, including the advantages of forging close MVP-style ties with favorite hardware and software vendors. “Being able to influence the product helps my business and my customers, because the product works better for them,” said Wayne



► **Charles Allen**
Dynamics GP MVP
BKD Technologies LLP
Managing Consultant
Springfield, Mo.

BKD touts Allen’s six consecutive years as a Microsoft MVP as a prominent part of its customer marketing.



► **Amy Babinchak**
Small Business Server MVP
Harbor Computer Services
President
Royal Oak, Mich.

The Harbor Computer Services homepage highlights three Microsoft designations to establish the company’s credibility: the Small Business Specialist logo, its award as the MPN 2010 Partner of the Year as a Small Business Specialist, and Babinchak’s MVP status.



► **Dan Holme**
SharePoint MVP
AvePoint Inc.
Chief SharePoint Evangelist
Jersey City, N.J.

AvePoint Inc. hired Holme in late March, in part because of his stature in the Microsoft MVP community, to spread the word about SharePoint among customers and potential customers.



► **Michael Cocanower**
Small Business Server MVP
itSynergy
Founder and President
Phoenix

itSynergy uses the MVP logo on its homepage with the text, “itSynergy is proud to be the only company in the Southwest with one of 48 worldwide Small Business Server MVPs on staff.”



► **Mike Snyder**
 Dynamics CRM MVP
 Sonoma Partners LLC
 Co-Founder and Principal
 Chicago

Snyder and co-founder Jim Steger are both Dynamics CRM MVPs and display that status prominently in their executive profiles on the Sonoma Partners Web site.



► **Mark Polino**
 Dynamics GP MVP
 I.B.I.S. Inc.
 Principal Consultant
 Altamonte Springs, Fla.

When Polino achieved his third consecutive designation as an MVP more than a year ago, Andy Vabulas, CEO of I.B.I.S., said, "We are very proud to have such high-caliber team members, which allows us to offer our clients the options they want from the best and brightest."



► **Chad Mosman**
 Office 365 MVP
 MessageOps
 Founder and Principal
 Consultant
 Charlotte, N.C.

One of the top-selling U.S. Business Productivity Online Suite partners, MessageOps trades heavily on Mosman's status as one of the first Office 365 MVPs.



► **Shane Young**
 SharePoint MVP
 SharePoint911
 Owner and Principal Consultant
 Cincinnati

The company that Young founded in 2004 is almost a team of SharePoint MVPs—colleagues Randy Drisgill, Todd Klindt and John Ross also hold MVP titles.

Small, a Small Business Server MVP and founder of Correct Solutions Pty Ltd., an SMB-focused solution provider with two offices in Sydney, Australia. Vendors, for their part, benefit from the sort of in-depth technical feedback that small business owners are rarely equipped to provide, noted Julian Waits, vice president for strategic relationships at GFI Software, a Cary, N.C.-based maker of Web, e-mail and network-security products for SMBs. "To get the sophisticated input, there's nowhere to go but the partners," he said.

Still, speakers cautioned, for both parties to have the sort of tight working relationships that MVPs have with Microsoft, they must be careful not to abuse the privilege. For partners, that means not bothering your vendor contacts with routine tech support matters. For vendors, it means not pestering partners with news about the newest product launches and promotional offers. "We don't go out and sell the latest thing because it's on special," said Small. "We sell the customers what they need to fix their business problems, and I don't think a lot of the vendors get that."

Not that Small or most of the other MVPs at the conference were unhappy with Microsoft in general or the MVP program in particular. "It continues to be pretty strong," said Dave Sobel, CEO of Evolve Technologies LLC, a business IT consultancy and Microsoft Small Business Specialist in Fairfax, Va. "The nice thing about the MVP community is it's a bunch of highly motivated folks," he added. "It tends to be naturally a very healthy community."

Microsoft's assessment of the MVP program is upbeat as well. According to Nestor Portillo, director of community support services at Microsoft and worldwide head of the MVP program, there are presently more than 4,000 MVPs from 89 countries distributing technical expertise on Microsoft products in 40 languages. About 27 percent of them are drawn from the Microsoft partner community. Others are independent consultants, small business owners, corporate IT employees or just plain hobbyists, like the firefighter in Osaka, Japan, who shares Microsoft Excel tips in his spare time.

RCP Top Microsoft Partner MVPs



► **Dave Sobel**

Virtual Machine MVP

Evolve Technologies

CEO

Fairfax, Va.

Sobel's status as a Microsoft MVP is an important component of Evolve Technologies' customer marketing, both in his bio and in company news releases.



► **Dan English**

SQL Server MVP

Superior Consulting Services

(SCS) LLC

BI Consultant

Minneapolis

In a statement announcing English's MVP status in July, SCS owner John Miller said, "This award is a dual testament to Dan's expertise and SCS's status as a Microsoft leader."

And they're all more valuable to Microsoft than ever, says Portillo, who's been working with MVPs in one capacity or another over the last decade. "Seven years ago the program was more like a thank you," he observes. Today, MVPs are in regular contact with key developers in Microsoft product groups, sharing feedback and suggestions. Portillo expects MVPs to exert increasing influence on Microsoft's cloud-computing platform, too, noting that cloud-related sessions drew heavy attendance at this year's MVP Global Summit. "The future is the cloud," he says, and MVPs are clamoring for as much information as they can get their hands on about Microsoft's emerging cloud strategy and roadmap.

EVEN EASIER

As for MVP Nation's future, Brelsford intends to repeat the event in 2012. "The feedback was good," he says. The event's sponsors appreciated the candid product appraisals they got from the MVPs, while the MVPs appreciated the opportunity to attend sessions specifically designed for them on communications-related topics such as writing a book, giving a speech and maintaining a blog. "We thought, 'here's some content that Microsoft will not, cannot and maybe should not deliver, that we can do a better job of,'" Brelsford says.

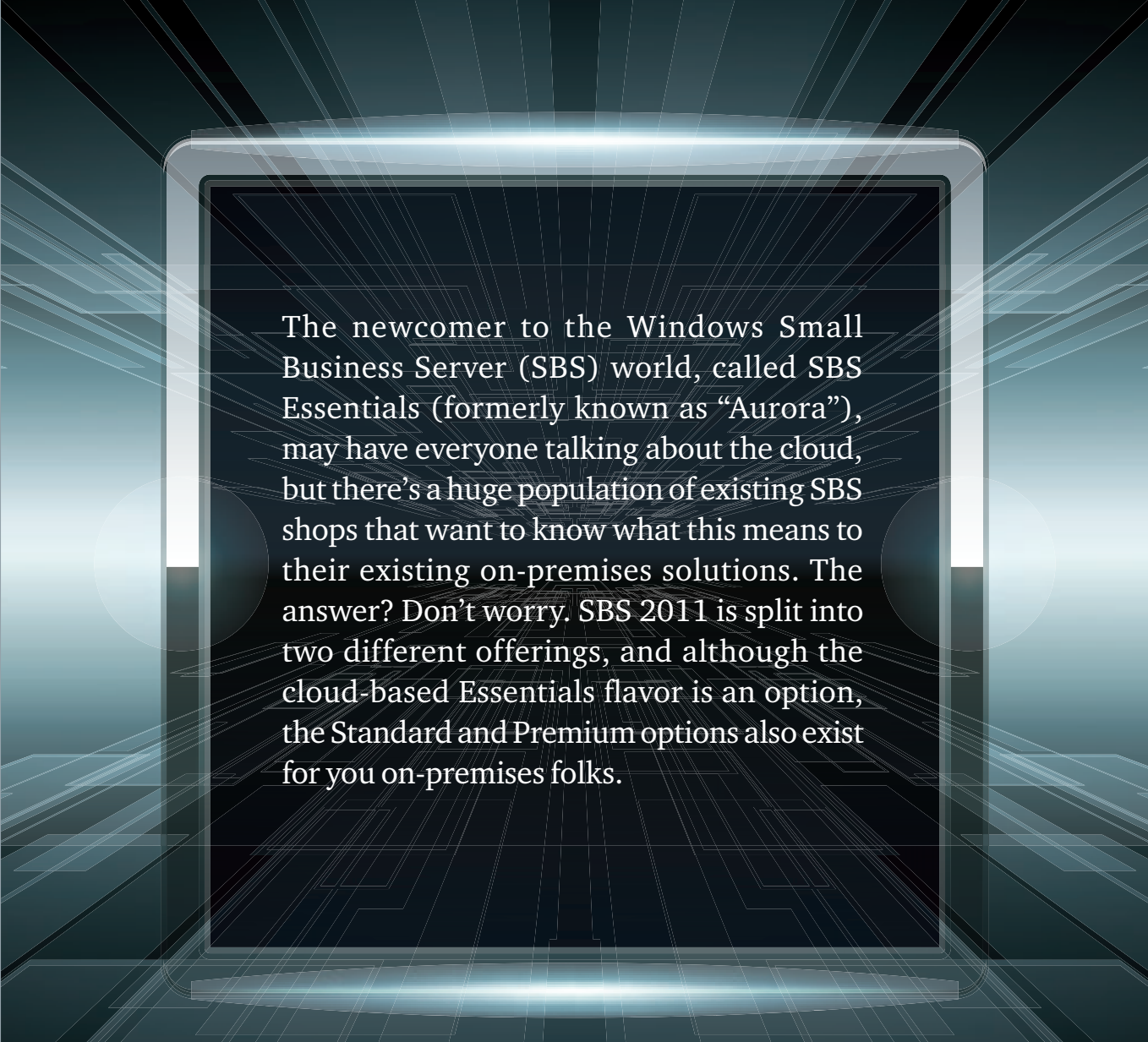
What Sobel enjoyed most, however, was the attendee interaction. MVPs earn that designation by contributing hours of advice to other IT professionals. "This was an opportunity to continue that when it's pretty easy," he noted. "We were already there."

Brelsford plans to make attending the conference even easier next year by staging it in one of the same hotels MVPs stay in during the Global Summit. "We're going to align the venue to be an elevator ride [away]," he says. All the more reason for MVPs to tack two days of sharing insights with others onto three days of learning from Microsoft. •

Rich Freeman is a Seattle, Wash.-based freelance writer who covers business and technology. He can be reached at richfree99@hotmail.com.

SBS 2011

For shops of 25 to 75 seats with traditional IT requirements, the on-premises version of Microsoft Small Business Server still makes a lot of sense, and the new release contains a lot for partners and IT to like. **By J. Peter Bruzzese**



The newcomer to the Windows Small Business Server (SBS) world, called SBS Essentials (formerly known as “Aurora”), may have everyone talking about the cloud, but there’s a huge population of existing SBS shops that want to know what this means to their existing on-premises solutions. The answer? Don’t worry. SBS 2011 is split into two different offerings, and although the cloud-based Essentials flavor is an option, the Standard and Premium options also exist for you on-premises folks.

TARGET AUDIENCE

When you read about the cloud-based Essentials, it's hard not to feel like a dinosaur for wanting to maintain an on-premises server. Everything is all about the cloud these days, but unless you have a shop of 25 or fewer systems, Essentials just isn't for you. That's the cut off right now. Where SBS 2011 Standard provides consistency is in the 75-user limit, so existing SBS users that fall within that range don't have to feel pressured into the cloud just yet.

The features in SBS 2011 are what you've come to expect, but the caliber of the server itself (based on Windows Server 2008 R2)—and the applications included—has been kicked up more than a notch. You're looking at an on-premises Exchange Server 2010 SP1, a SharePoint Foundation 2010 server (which is the next flavor of SharePoint Services) and Windows Server Update Services (WSUS) 2.0 SP2. For an easier migration, SBS 2011 includes migration tools with pre-migration analysis tools.

Note that the Migration Preparation Tool is run off the DVD on the source (legacy) SBS server and it scans the health of the existing domain to look for whatever issues might prevent a smooth migration. One example would be if Exchange doesn't have the right service pack installed to allow for co-existence and migration. The tool will raise the forest functional level of the existing domain/forest to 2003. It will extend the Active Directory schema and make adjustments to Exchange to run in Native Mode (SBS 2003 only). Once you install it, you have a 14-day window to start the migration. If you miss your window you have to re-run the tool. The tool will help create an answer file for use when installing the SBS 2011 server.

If you need a little more from your SBS environment, you can opt for the Premium Add-on, which includes Windows Server 2008 R2 Standard with SQL Server 2008 R2 Standard for Small Business, an add-on available for both Standard and Essentials clients. This add-on option allows your company to run a variety of line-of-business (LOB) apps in tandem with your SBS servers.

INSTALLATION IMPRESSIONS

My first impression was that SBS took a long time to install—but that would make

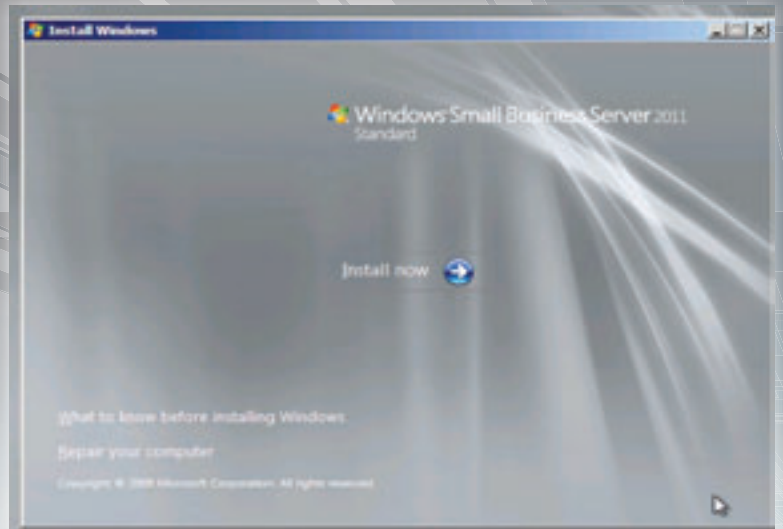


Figure 1. Installing Windows SBS 2011 Standard.

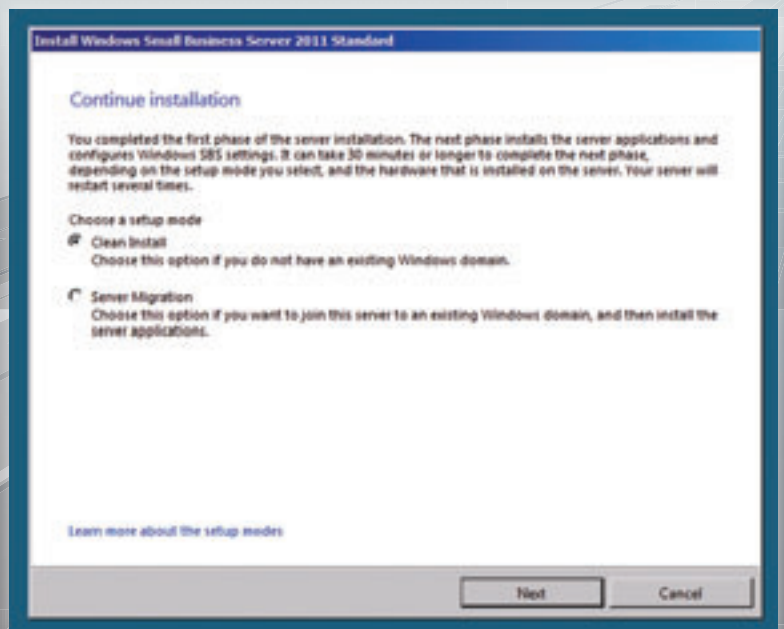


Figure 2. Choosing to perform a clean install or a server migration installation.

sense due to the installation of so many server applications along with the OS itself. I also noticed that the installation on my Hyper-V server failed repeatedly because I didn't allocate enough resources for it. The minimum requirements for SBS 2011 Standard include a Quad Core 2GHz (x64) processor, 8GB of RAM and 120GB of hard disk space. It was that last one that kept getting me. When I do quick installs of Windows Server 2008 R2 with Exchange Server 2010 SP1 I only need 20GB on the virtual machine (VM) to get it up and running. SBS 2011 requires a bit more or the install will fail. Once I learned that lesson, I completed the installation without a hiccup.

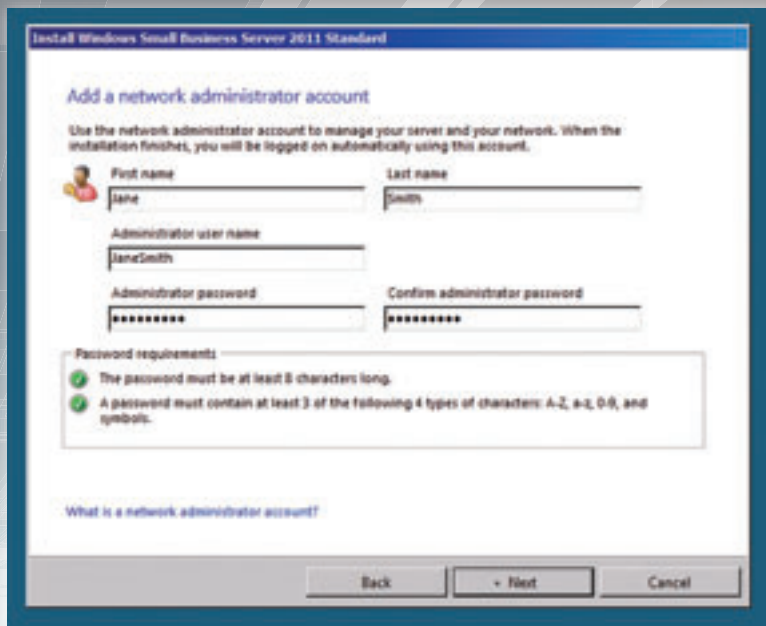


Figure 3. Personalize your server and your network.

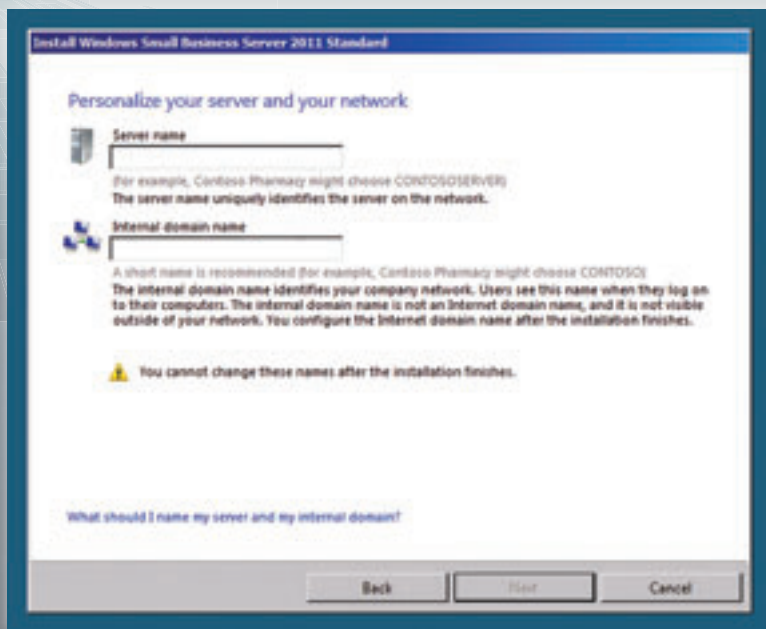


Figure 4. Add a network administrator account.

The install is idiot-proof, as you'd expect (see Figure 1, opposite page). The initial options are no different than a typical Windows Server 2008 R2 install. An admin is faced with a license agreement, a choice of a partition and drive for installation, and then the process takes off without user involvement until it gets to the end.

As you can see in Figures 2 (opposite page), 3 and 4 (this page), the questions are easy enough to follow along with. You can also configure your network settings so that the server can check online for any updates and so forth during the installation process. Before finalizing installation, you can check double check the settings (see Figure 5, p. 36) to ensure everything is accurate.

If you attempt to install SBS 2011 as a VM with Hyper-V (as I did), you'll encounter an error that says, "The user role cannot be found. Select a different user role." This can only be fixed through a reinstall, and the reinstall process will continue repeatedly until you make an important change. Under the Settings for the VM, you need to locate the Integration Services under Management and de-select the Time Synchronization option.

One of the things I love about SBS is that I have full access to my traditional Windows Server 2008 R2 administrative tools, so I don't feel like a baby that has to use the console that's provided. However, I have to admit, after walking around the SBS Standard Console (shown in Figure 6, p. 36), I can't help but feel drawn in by the easy-to-use interface.

WORKING WITH THE SBS CONSOLE

There are seven key groupings to choose from, and each one offers a variety of easy-to-click links and tasks to make the experience simple. Unfortunately for the non-admin, it really isn't "simple" per se. It requires oversight by someone who truly knows what they're doing. Here are the groupings and their purposes:

1. Home: Has a Task Pad with tasks for you to complete post-installation that you can check off as completed when done. To the right is a Network Essentials Summary that shows information about your Security, Updates, Backup Configuration and Other Alerts.

2. Users and Groups: Lets you add your user accounts to the domain. When adding a new user you can choose for them to be a Standard User, a Network Administrator or a "Standard User with administration links." You have the ability to create your own roles that include Group membership, preconfigured e-mail settings (like mailbox quota sizes and Outlook Web App, or OWA, permissions), remote access, VPN allow/deny permissions, and shared folder access. The Groups tab lets you add both e-mail distribution-oriented groups and standard security groups.

3. Network: Allows you to view the status of your server (which you can already see on the Home tab), as well as configure the connection of client computers to the network and various devices (printers, fax machines and so forth) within your environment. There's a Connectivity tab that's filled with options like

the ability to configure a VPN, add a trusted certificate, fix the network, manage POP connectors, work with your firewall and more.

Note: One of the cool features here is the ability to set up your Internet connection through the Connect to the Internet wizard, which will check for any additional Dynamic Host Configuration Protocol (DHCP) services running on your network (it doesn't like that), and detect routers and so forth to ensure you can access this server from anywhere. From there you can use the Internet Address Management wizard to establish a presence for your SBS server on the Internet. Essentially what this wizard does is let you establish an Internet domain name to use (which is different from the .local you're using internally), so you'll need to have the name or names in mind, and your credit card. If you have a name and provider already you can just provide this information.

4. Shared Folders and Web Sites: With the Shared Folders tab you have your Public folder, Redirected Folders and UserShares (and you can create others with a click on the Tasks pane). Redirecting folders is a great way to ensure a client's information is backed up and safe because it's held on the server. You can redirect the Desktop, Documents and Start Menu. The Web Sites are really interesting, however, because there are three by default:

- * *Remote Web Access (formerly known as Remote Web Workspace):* A secure local/remote Web site entrance that allows you to access network resources through the site (shown in Figure 7, opposite page). Note the ability you have to check e-mail and the SharePoint site, and even remote desktop directly to your server or other systems, if you have the right permissions to connect.

- * *OWA:* With Exchange Server 2010 Microsoft prefers this be called Outlook Web App; it allows people to access their e-mail remotely.

- * *Internal Web Site:* This is your SharePoint Foundations site (shown in Figure 8, opposite page), and it's a huge improvement over SharePoint Services 3.0. Many in the SBS community were looking forward to running OWA on their Standard SBS through SharePoint Foundations, but this is not supported on domain controllers (DCs) and there's no workaround that Microsoft could see to provide sufficient security and reliability.

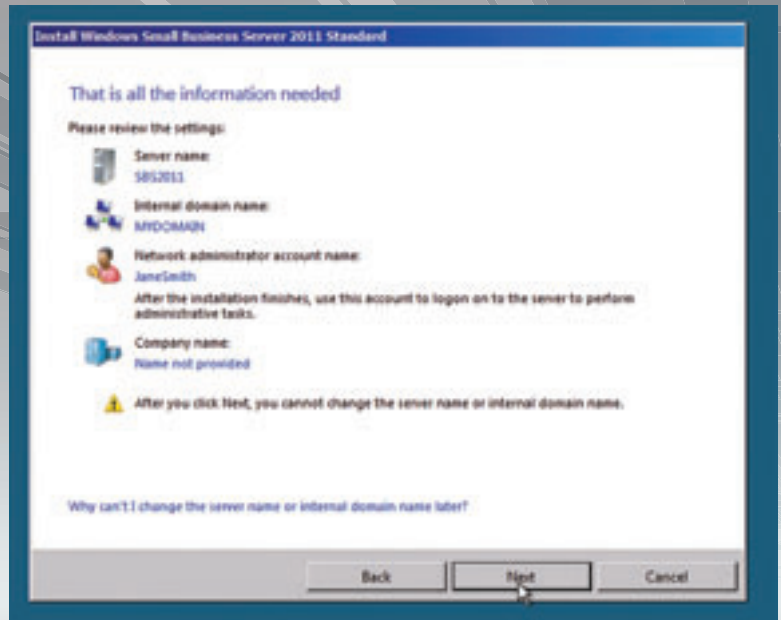


Figure 5. A summary of configured information.

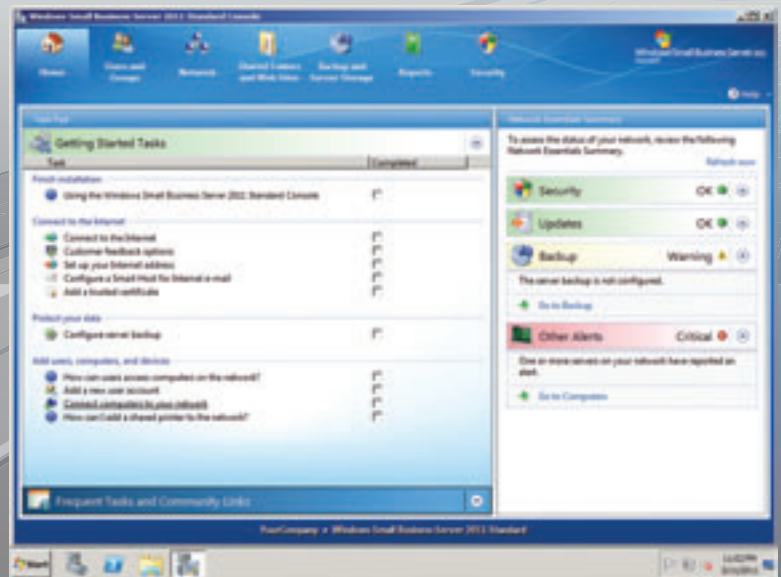


Figure 6. The SBS Standard Console.

However, this is still possible for those who have the Premium Add-on, but keep in mind that it requires Volume Licensing (VL) for Office 2010 to use OWA. I might interject here that Exchange and other server applications aren't usually supported on a DC, either, but SBS is supposed to be the exception to many of the known "rules" we've come to know in the larger enterprise deployments of these technologies.

5. Backup and Server Storage: An easy-to-use backup wizard that allows admins to design and implement a backup/restore strategy using the internal Windows Server Backup utility. One important thing to keep in mind here is that the wizard makes it simple for a newcomer to back up Windows. It's designed to give admins no other

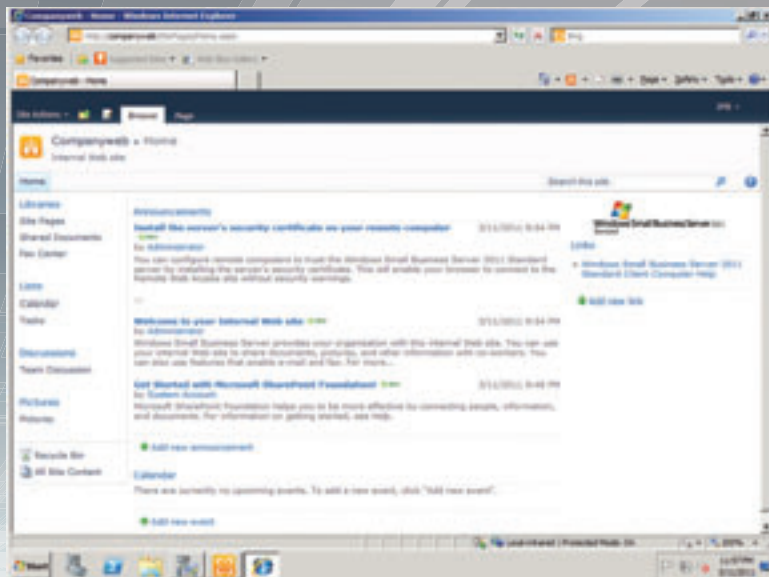


Figure 7. Remote Web Access.



Figure 8. SharePoint Foundations.

choice but to configure a recurring backup that will grab for a “full backup of all critical volumes that [are] Bare-Metal Recovery capable,” according to the Official SBS Blog. If you want to take advantage of some of the newer features in Server 2008 R2 Windows Server Backup, you can still do that—but you’re going to have to leave the wizard alone and go work with the real tool. The Server Storage tab allows you to move the location of various data types (Exchange, SharePoint and so on).

6. Reports: SBS is set up with two reports by default, which run on a schedule. This feature is a neat way for SBS admins to get the info they need without a great deal of fuss. A Summary Network Report, as well as a Detailed Network Report that is configured to

be e-mailed to you by default, are already set up to tell you about your server’s performance.

7. Security: SBS also displays your security essentials, such as virus protection, spam filtering and firewall on client systems, as well as spam protection for e-mail and the server firewall settings. An Updates tab allows you to work with your WSUS settings.

FINAL WORD ON SBS 2011

I loved SBS 2011—but I wouldn’t drop it off at an office and tell the local part-time IT guy that it’s easy to work with. You can see from the installation choices above that this is going to take skills that relate more to the enterprise, which is why partner expertise for deployment is such a great fit in the SBS world. Exchange Server 2010 SP1? That alone says it all. However, for smaller shops of 25 to 75 users, where you need to provide a domain login, e-mail service on-premises, collaboration, remote access, all-in-one backup and more, SBS 2011 Standard is a no-brainer.

It all depends on how you look at it, really. What some call “complexities,” I see as incredibly advanced feature sets with lots of added functionality. Where some may see tedious management, I see hands-on support for on-premises control over your mission-critical apps and services, rather than relinquishing that control to the cloud. Call me a dinosaur, but I think a lot of IT guys feel the same way and will continue to do so, even though Microsoft has wisely taken the approach of splitting SBS into two offerings (one with a cloud-based focus and the other more traditional).

I don’t see it yet as a matter of taking sides or fighting the future, but rather as meeting the needs of your clients, whatever those needs might be.

I give SBS 2011 Standard a thumbs up. •

J. Peter Bruzzese (Triple-MCSE, MCT, MCITP), an Exchange MVP, is the co-founder of ClipTraining, an Exchange and SharePoint Instructor for Train Signal, a well-known technical author for Que/Sams and others, a technical speaker for Techmentor, Connections and, at times, Tech-Ed, and the Enterprise Windows columnist for InfoWorld. Follow him on Twitter at twitter.com/JPBruzzese.

Growing by One Degree of Separation



It's when there's more than one degree of separation from your core offering that things unravel.

Those of you who regularly read this column know by now that the No. 1 growth mantra we espouse is specialization. What this means is to own a segment of the market positioned at the intersection of a technical and vertical market and drive your company to be the No. 1 or No. 2 player in the market in which you serve.

Having achieved that lofty position, then what? Where do you go from there? How, where and when do you expand? The answer lies in what's called the adjacency growth strategy. That is, taking what you do best and expanding into an adjacent opportunity that's one degree of separation from where you are, and no more than one degree of separation.

This idea gained currency a number of years ago in a book titled "Beyond the Core: Expand Your Market Without Abandoning Your Roots," by Chris Zook (Harvard Business Press, 2004).

The point of an adjacency growth strategy is to generate incremental growth, both organic and acquisitive, by staying close to your roots in terms of your customer base, your service lines, your value chain, your technology focus, your vertical focus and so on, and never, ever overreaching these competencies. It's when there's more than one degree of separation from your core offering that things unravel.

Sadly, the marketplace in all industries is littered with the debris of companies whose growth strategies reached too

far, or stretched the roots of the company beyond the breaking point.

The author suggests three principles for adopting a successful adjacent growth strategy, to wit:

1. The adjacent market must be of a sufficient size, or have the potential to be large enough to warrant the investment you need to make.
2. This adjacency has to be attached to the hip of your current core competency; the one degree of separation rule.
3. The farther away you move from your core, the riskier your endeavor will be.

Let's take an example. Imagine you're a network security or an IT security firm and suddenly you have a brainstorm, for whatever reason, that you think there's gold to be found in ERP implementation. While ERP is a richly endowed market of considerable size, you're now dealing with two different businesses, two different buyers, two different competitive sets and skills sets—and you're venturing too far beyond your roots.

One measure that we use to test an adjacency is to take a look at your top 10 customers and look at the economic buyer. Then ask yourself, is the adjacency service or market or offering you're contemplating going to help you get a greater share of wallet from that buyer? Are there efficiencies already built into your value chain that you can



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leverage without having to go beyond your knowledge base? If the answer is no, or we hope so, or maybe, then you've probably gone beyond the one degree of separation that defines an adjacency strategy and you're better off going back to the drawing board.

We offer this cautionary tale up because we see a collective giddiness, or undisciplined expansion fervor, playing out in up markets. Now that it appears the recessionary doldrums of the past few years are waning, executives find themselves tempted to make up for lost time by trying to do too much too fast. There's a tendency to get drunk on optimism and think that if they're a technology services provider, or a systems integrator, they can do anything along the technology continuum and be successful.

The task now is to take a less exuberant, more sober assessment of where you are on your growth plan and ask yourself:

1. Are we No. 1 or No. 2 in the market we serve?
2. What specifically is our corporate focus, our reason for being, that which we are absolutely great at doing?
3. What are the logical adjacency opportunities that we can most naturally and efficiently glue to our core that give us the knowledge base, the skill set and the efficiencies to appeal to the economic buyer with expertise and credibility?

Remember, it's all about one degree of separation. •

Mike Harvath is CEO of Revenue Rocket Consulting Group, an IT services growth consultancy. You can reach him at mharvath@revenuerocket.com.

Next topic: Managing Through the Curse of Growth

Channel Metrics Most People Ignore



Traditionally, businesses monitor things like revenue, leads and phone calls made. All are important items to measure, but they only tell part of the story.

Measuring anything is becoming increasingly important these days. As companies redefine themselves and implement systems and processes that focus on efficiency and productivity, they must make sure they're achieving the desired results. The only way to do this is by measurement. Because of the leverage that channels provide, companies are placing a greater emphasis on their channels—necessitating the need to better monitor and manage these initiatives. Let's start by discussing the importance of accurately measuring your channel.

At Channel Consulting Corp., we've developed a comprehensive practice around channel Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). In fact, we have more than 75 channel-specific KPIs that companies should monitor. Over the next few months, we'll examine the categories of measurement, some examples of KPIs within each category, and the reasons why you should monitor these KPIs. I'll focus on the more unique KPIs that are often overlooked.

By measuring a KPI, you can monitor the progress of your channel. Traditionally, businesses monitor things like revenue, leads and phone calls made. All are important items to measure, but they only tell part of the story. There's more information to be gleaned by breaking out KPIs into categories. The categories include sales, marketing,

systems, recruitment, productivity, enablement, market intelligence, efficiency and company. Each one of these categories has several KPIs in it and each KPI then produces a piece of intelligence that contributes to the overall health of your channel.

Let's look at two of the categories now, and further categories in subsequent columns—starting with sales and marketing.

Measurement of sales has been and always will be the key indicator of success. That's easy to figure out. However, here are a few unique KPIs that lend further insight into the sales area that you may or may not have been aware of:

1. Cross-Sell/Up-Sell Percentage on Transactions. This KPI determines how well you're doing with increasing the per-deal value by cross-selling and up-selling.

2. New Customer Productivity. This KPI determines if your salesperson, or partner, tends to sell more to existing accounts or to "net new" accounts. This is important to understand if you're trying to change the behavior of your sales team—think *cloud!*

3. Number of Pitches Made by Salesperson or Partner. This KPI determines how well you're doing with the number and type of pitches—and the value of each—as it relates to your pipeline.



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For marketing, take a look at some of the following unique KPIs that will illuminate this area of your business:

1. Month-over-Month Growth Rate of Your Pipeline. This determines the ideal growth rate of your pipeline as it relates to achieving your desired revenue numbers. This is different than simply tracking pipeline value! Growth rate determines the amount of effort on a monthly basis that needs to go into maintaining the proper amount of pipeline.

2. Performing Products Related to Marketing Campaigns. Not so much a unique KPI, but important because this shows the correlation between where you're spending your marketing money and where you're receiving your revenue. These two areas should always be in alignment.

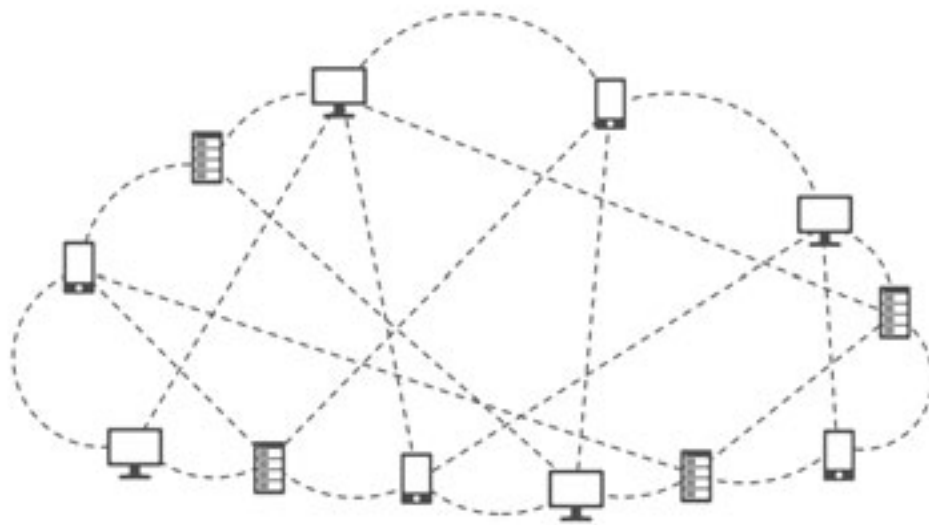
3. Top Underperforming Products. This sounds like an easy KPI, and it is; however, the importance of this particular metric is that you may have some great new products or services, but they're just not making it out there. This could be a function of underinvestment or a marketing message that isn't quite right.

Tracking the typical KPIs is vital, but hopefully the KPIs listed here give you a sense of other important metrics you can use to make your channel or portfolio of offerings work better. Stay tuned for the next series of articles, where we'll examine other categories of KPIs. •

Keith Lubner is managing partner of Channel Consulting Corp., a global consulting organization focused on channel strategy, design, enablement, outsourcing and training. Reach him at klubner@channelconsultingcorp.com.

Next Time: More Key Performance Indicators

HP Looks to Help Partners Build Cloud Expertise



While Hewlett-Packard Co. is a latecomer to the cloud, the company is trying to make up for lost time.

HP's new CEO Leo Apotheker has made clear the cloud will embody everything the company offers, from webOS-based TouchPads and phones to printers, PCs, and enterprise systems and services.

Apotheker insists he wants partners to sell HP's cloud-based solutions. The company's new CloudSystem Partner Program aims to enable solution providers to build enterprise cloud-computing expertise.

Kicked off at the HP Americas Partner Conference in Las Vegas in late March, the new CloudSystem Partner Program is focused on helping partners sell the HP CloudSystem portfolio, which consists of

the company's Cloud Service Automation software, Cloud Maps configuration templates and its related BladeSystem Matrix hardware.

The program emphasizes helping partners sell internal private cloud solutions to enterprises, says Frank Rauch, VP of channel sales for the HP enterprise servers, storage and networking business. "That's where we're seeing a lot of the activity," Rauch explains.

To that end, HP has launched its Cloud Enablement Program, which offers training, certification and financial incentives that include leasing options for acquiring HP's "Converged Infrastructure" of servers, networking and storage solutions, along with the CloudSystem software portfolio.

"We're seeing a number of partners who want to build out their own cloud

offerings," Rauch says. "Whether it's public, hybrid or whatever, we've put together a set of programs that utilize market development funds, hardware incentives, financing [and] engineering help to be able to help them build out their own clouds."

The company also will allow partners to sell its new Cloud Discovery Workshop, a service in which HP consultants meet with a customer to assess requirements and develop a cloud strategy. Right now, partners can sell the Cloud Discovery Workshop and sit in on the sessions, but they can't deliver the services. Over time, that will change, Rauch says. "We want to be able to make it scale out," he notes.

HP has talked up some large partners that are participating and investing in its new programs, including its Cloud Centers of Excellence. Rauch acknowledges the need to appeal to smaller partners: "To be honest with you, we're starting out with some big names, but we think it will scale over time."

Besides its impact on smaller partners, other questions about HP's cloud efforts remain. For example, what about that public cloud service Apotheker announced, and plans to roll it out by year's end or early 2012? Will HP let partners sell and implement services based on that new offering? "That's to be determined," Rauch says. "I can tell you, though, there's extremely strong commitment from the top down, to be able to channelize what we do."

That commitment notwithstanding, HP must contend with a crowded pack of competitors that have launched similar programs (see last month's column, "IT Vendors Migrate Partners to the Cloud"). The challenge will be to make this work for the broader partner base while giving them a reason to invest in HP's program versus those of Cisco, IBM and others. •

Check out his Schwartz Cloud Report blog at RCPmag.com/CloudReport

Jeffrey Schwartz is executive editor of RCP.

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