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6 Essential Microsoft Partner Tools

Reap the benefits of Microsoft's \$1.7 billion investment in its Partner Program using these resources designed to help you do what you do best.



September 01, 2005

by Joel Shore

Last year, Microsoft announced a record \$1.7 billion investment for its partner program in 2005, part of which went toward creating new support tools for the partner community. According to Allison Watson, vice president of the company's Worldwide Partner Sales and Marketing Group, the investment signifies Microsoft's commitment to create a world-class program to help partners exceed their business objectives.

So far, the plan seems to be bearing fruit. Already this year, partners of all levels have been given access to several new resources as well as revamped favorites. But the tools can't help you if you choose not to use them. Make sure you're taking advantage of every resource Microsoft now offers by perusing this list of six top Microsoft partner tools now available.

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1. Partner Channel Builder

Purpose: Help partners build relationships with each other and collaborate on new opportunities

Main Features: Opportunity database, searchable partner directory

Available To: All partners



Launched in February 2005, Partner Channel Builder continues to evolve. Rapidly becoming among the most popular of partner Web destinations, it assists partners in creating business relationships with other Microsoft partners that have complementary competencies or business opportunities. According to Microsoft, the goal of Partner Channel Builder is to foster collaborative relationships, leading partners into new business opportunities that they could not create on their own.

As of Aug. 1, Partner Channel Builder's activity summary box showed 135,346 partners registered worldwide, with 871 showcasing their solutions and 90 offering co-partnering opportunities. Among the newest solutions are a bank reconciliation add-on for Microsoft Business Solutions (MBS) Great Plains, a Web publishing platform and a regulatory compliance solution for various platforms, including Microsoft Operations Manager 2005.

"The Partner Channel Builder initiative marks an important recognition by Microsoft that partner-to-partner relationships can do as much for the company as partner relationships with Microsoft itself," says Paul DeGroot, an analyst with industry think tank Directions on Microsoft in Kirkland, Wash.

"Partners are telling us that 40 percent of their new business opportunities are coming from partnering with other partners," comments Watson, who says it's all in the math. "When you have 250,000 partners who each connect with four other partners, that's 1 million connections that could lead to new opportunities." If each connection resulted in two deals, that would be 2 million new deals.

When it comes to partner tools, Microsoft is betting big on Partner Channel Builder. In June, the company released version 2 of the resource, providing full access to Microsoft Registered Members that opt in. The new version features redesigned pages for creating comprehensive solutions and opportunities. (When performing search operations, Gold Certified Partners are listed first, followed by Certified and then Registered Members.)

Microsoft's bet has paid off big for Ascentn Corp. Just two years ago, the Mountain View, Calif.-based ISV was developing business process management solutions for banks, insurers and manufacturers on Sun Microsystems Inc.'s J2EE platform. Won over by the breadth of Microsoft's technical and marketing tools, company President Jesse Shiah signed on as a partner and became Gold Certified. This year, the company was named a Partner of the Year for Technology Innovation in Information Worker Solutions.

"We got up to speed on products by subscribing to the Microsoft Action Pack, but it is the Partner Channel Builder that most interested us," says Shiah. "The single largest benefit of working with Microsoft is its partner channel. We've established many new partner relationships that have led to customer engagements."

2. Partner Solution Profiler

Purpose: Market solutions to customers and other partner simultaneously

Main Features: Web-based profiling

Available To: All partners



Built with the idea to "profile a solution once and then communicate it everywhere," Partner Solution Profiler helps partners market solutions online. Entering your offerings in the Partner Solution Profiler makes the information available to both customers and other partners, through Partner Channel Builder and other customer-facing solution directories.

Like Partner Channel Builder, Microsoft lets partners of all levels use the Partner Solution Provider tool. Note that Microsoft requires that solution profiles be supported by customer references, which may be validated by Microsoft at any time.

3. Response Management Teams

Purpose: To help partners quickly get customer problems routed and resolved

Main Features: Web-based form, 24-hour initial response

Available To: Certified and Gold Certified Partners only



As Microsoft has grown over the years, resolving issues has become more complicated. Simply figuring out whom to ask is not always clear, and knowing where in the queue a question lies hasn't been easy to discern. Recognizing that addressing issues quickly and authoritatively is essential to keeping both partners and their customers happy, Microsoft developed Response Management for Partners.

Launched in early 2005, Response Management for Partners is a security-enhanced, confidential Web-based tool that offers Gold Certified and Certified Partners a way to escalate Microsoft-related customer and partner issues directly to Microsoft. Through a Web-based form, partners can submit issues that are routed to subject matter experts. Status of submitted issues can be viewed online.

According to Microsoft, Response Management for Partners is at its best when used to resolve issues relating to product functionality, licensing, sales and marketing, and account management. Issues relating to partner programs, access to gated areas of the partner Web site, and technical or competitive support are best handled through partner support or local account managers.

When an issue is submitted, Microsoft's Response Management Team responds within one business day, providing a brief update. A final response or status update is provided within the next three business days.

4. Telephone-Based Presales Technical Support

Purpose: Live technical and non-technical pre-sales support

Main Features: Technical and non-technical support, Competitive Sales Assistance

Available To: Certified and Gold Certified Partners only



Sometimes, the old methods still work best, and that's true with Microsoft's Telephone-Based Pre-Sales Technical Support (TPTS) program.

With TPTS, there's a live person at the other end of the phone ready to serve up answers. This pre-sales technical specialist can assist with both technical and non-technical pre-sales questions for all Microsoft products, including MBS.

A new component to TPTS is Competitive Sales Assistance, which is intended to assist partners in overcoming customer objections and positively positioning Microsoft technologies against the competition. Competitive information consists of white papers, discussion guides, case studies and customer-ready presentations. TPTS also can be used to troubleshoot deployment problems and to obtain scenario-specific configuration guidance.

Available as an unlimited benefit for Microsoft Certified and Gold Certified Partners, it is positioned as an incentive to get Registered Members to move up the partner ladder.

Scott Johnson, vice president of Sales and Alliances at Ensynch, a Tempe, Ariz., Gold Certified Partner, is a partner who knows the value of this tool. Recently facing a customer that was considering a solution based on Oracle Collaboration Suite, Ensynch needed to demonstrate the benefits of an Exchange Server

solution. "We are not experts in Oracle, so we turned to TPTS to provide us with competitive information that allowed us to contrast the two products," he says.

Armed with comparative technical data, PowerPoint presentations and white papers furnished by the TPTS staff, Ensynch entered into an engagement to provide and install Exchange Server. "The response we got from TPTS directly led to significant new business for Ensynch," Johnson says.

5. Marketing Center, Services and Guides

Purpose: Save partners time and money by providing customizable marketing materials as well as services for managing and delivering campaigns

Main Features: Customizable campaign materials, back-end services, how-to guides

Available To: All partners



It's one thing to have competencies in-house; getting the message out to potential customers is quite another. Microsoft offers three services that combine to provide a complete marketing back-end for partners: Partner Marketing Center for customizable materials; Marketing How-To Guides for planning your overall campaign; and Marketing Services for Partners, also known as Partner Direct, for bringing it all together and getting your message out the door. In a refreshing change from partner sites that are product-oriented, these resources focus completely on business.

Through both the Partner Marketing Center and Partner Direct, you can access tools that allow you to create professional marketing materials, saving the significant expense associated with hiring an outside graphic design firm. Campaign materials, including PowerPoint presentations, pre-drafted business letters and e-mail messages, and flyers and postcards for mailing the old-fashioned way, are all available for download and customization.

Currently, through the Partner Marketing Center, Microsoft offers materials for 10 specific campaigns, including enterprise project management, Microsoft Office system solutions and several aimed at the small business market.

A new tool in the Partner Marketing Center allows partners to build custom logos that identify achieved competencies. Once created, logos can be downloaded in various file formats for use in print and online marketing materials. The logo builder can be accessed only by Certified or Gold Certified Partners, or by Registered Members that are Small Business Specialists.

The Partner Direct Web site takes the offerings to the next level, allowing partners to launch campaigns entirely through the site, with Microsoft handling all the back-end needs, such as list selection, purchasing, printing, posting and mailing. Lists can be selected on a variety of demographics, including industry and geographic location.

"We're not in the business of designing professional-quality marketing materials," says Ensynch's Johnson. By working with the local Microsoft account manager and using Partner Direct, Ensynch schedules live seminars, coordinating venues and guest speakers, and markets them using tools available through Partner Direct.

Ensynch is careful to measure the impact of seminars and other marketing tools on its overall business and provide feedback to the local Microsoft account manager. "It's the only way to weigh value against cost and continually refine the process," Johnson says.

At Nakisa Inc., a Gold Certified and Certified Business Solutions Partner based in Montreal, John Payés takes the partner relationship seriously.

As director for Microsoft Global Alliances at the 100-person company, his sole role is to manage the relationship with Microsoft and leverage partner resources. "We use Channel Builder to find opportunities with other partners, then use Partner Direct to create marketing templates for joint campaigns and seminars," he says.

To take full advantage of the tools, Nakisa has aligned its business according to

Microsoft's fiscal year (which ends on June 30). "That way," Payés explains, "we're more in sync with their quarterly go-to-market plans, campaigns and product launches."

To help partners plan, Microsoft offers the Marketing How-To Guides. Available as a series of documents or in one all-encompassing, 80-page PDF download, the program starts with that most basic technique of how to condense a complete marketing message into a 30-second speech—the so-called "elevator pitch." For any partner who knows everything about server software but less about serving customers, it's a good (albeit rudimentary) place to start.

With partners increasingly turning to in-person seminars to reel in potential customers, the guide thoroughly explores the art of staging a successful event. The roadmap covers setting goals, defining the audience, choosing a speaker, selecting a venue, inviting the audience and more. Detailed worksheets for calculating total cost—right down to name tags and pads of paper—follow through to measuring the results.

Other chapters cover development of effective promotional offers, writing an effective campaign plan and measuring return on investment. The guides also probe the details of using the power of telemarketing to generate leads, from choosing an outside telemarketing vendor to creation of performance incentives. Guides regarding direct and online marketing explore proven strategies for designing effective offers, managing the database and capturing high-quality leads.

All of these services are available to all levels of partners, although access to Partner Direct requires separate registration.

6. Partner Account Manager

Purpose: Provide one-on-one support for partner development

Main Features: Regular telephone contact, field visits

Available To: Certified and Gold Certified Partners only, availability and level of contact varies



For Bob Williams, CEO of risk management and compliance provider Manakoa Services Corp., the most essential tool that any partner can use to leverage the power of Microsoft comes not from a Web site or a Redmond-based marketing initiative. It's as simple as common sense: Take full advantage of the partner account manager Microsoft assigns you.

"Make yourself known to your account manager. Make sure they know what you are doing, who your customers are, what your strengths are," Williams says. "There is no better resource than to have your account manager recommend you to potential customers and to other partners."

Ensynch's Johnson agrees, but suggests performing an internal due-diligence process first.

"Assess your mission as a company," he explains. "The more you know about your business and the more Microsoft knows about you, the easier it is to ask Microsoft for help and support."

Joel Shore, co-founder and longtime director of the CRN Test Center, is managing director of Reference Guide in Southborough, Mass. He advises technology vendors on product-strategy and marketing matters.

More Information

We've made it easy to access the resources listed in the article above:

- [Microsoft Partner Channel Builder](#)
- [Partner Solution Profiler](#)
- [Response Management for Partners](#)