

EDITOR'S COMMENT

A CHANNEL FOCUS AND STRATEGIC ADVANTAGES POSITION PARTNERS FOR SUCCESS

HAYDEN SADLER, COUNTRY MANAGER, SOUTH AFRICA, INFINIDAT

Collaborating with channel partners and providing them with the necessary support and value adds is necessary if vendors are to overcome the challenges that the industry is facing. Hayden Sadler, Country Manager for South Africa, Infinidat, tells *Intelligent Tech Channels* that cutting out channel partners now or adopting a hybrid sales strategy puts vendors in a difficult position because lost trust can last a lifetime.

While many vendors have always taken a hybrid route to market approach, challenges brought about by the pandemic and economic upheaval has created a more competitive environment resulting in many vendors taking a more direct sales route. By cutting out channel partners now or adopting a hybrid sales strategy, vendors may place themselves in a difficult position later on.

Rather than losing sight of the channel during challenging times, vendors should be investing in them with a long-term strategic view toward current and future growth, creating a solid vendor-partner ecosystem. Collaborating with channel partners and providing them with the necessary support and value adds is necessary to achieve this.

Lost trust can last a lifetime

When it comes to sales and revenue, some vendors are feeling the pinch. There has

been a lot of pressure in terms of reduced spend, as well as prolonged project approvals, which results in shrinkage to the business. Data storage platforms in particular, are under increased scrutiny, and businesses are sweating their existing assets in many cases.



A knee-jerk response is for vendors to adopt a direct or hybrid sales approach whereby they sell directly to the end user as well as via the channel. This can seriously damage relationships and trust with partners that is essential for growth and success in the future. This trust could prove difficult, even impossible, to get back. Hence it is important for vendors to adopt a channel-centric strategy that is supportive of their partners growth whilst delivering a number of value adds to boost business on both sides.

Invest in the future

The reality is that channel partners are an integral and essential part of the route to market in South Africa and other developing countries. They are an effective extension of vendor business, helping to create a presence and geographic reach in more areas, as well as offering service, support, maintenance and other value-added services that enhance a vendor's brand. Without channel partners, vendors may find it difficult to serve these markets effectively.

As a result, a long-term view of the current economic climate is to build out the channel ecosystem and invest in it further, helping to support channel partners to flourish while increasing confidence and trust.

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Commitment and focus

Investing in channel partners with initiatives like training, certification and resources to support sales can help partners to deliver better value propositions to their customers and close more sales. In addition, demand generation events and other partner events are also instrumental in driving more partner sales and demonstrates the effectiveness of an ecosystem.

This type of investment is crucial for vendors as many regard the channel as their extended sales force and implementation partner. We created a certification programme which our official partners have participated in, not only to generate more revenue for themselves but to also deliver a better technical and support experience to their end user customers.

For example, Datacentrix became a Tier 1 reseller at the beginning of 2019 as well as an authorised Infinidat services partner for South Africa. Our relationship, certification and the partnership commitment from both sides provides us with a real strategic advantage with our end user customers. This support instils confidence in end users and has helped in strengthening our relationships with South African businesses. Infinidat's marketing support through networking and lead generation activities further make the prospect and sales process for Datacentrix a lot easier.

In a distribution environment that features multiple vendors, it is important for these vendors to provide a dedicated channel resource

for sales, support and marketing. All of this contributes to increased revenue, both for the channel and for the vendor. This is a win-win situation for all parties – channel partners grow, customers get better support and service, and vendors maintain and increase their business.

Certainly, for us, having a co-funded personnel resource at our distributor ensures they are supported in a seamless manner. The dedicated resource is part of the distribution team and is integrated with the organisation, whilst having a sharp focus on our offering. This provides a 'go to' person that has the vendor and distributor's best interests at heart.

Taking a long-term view is essential to creating sustainable business models and cutting channel partners out is the antithesis of this approach. Our focus now, more than ever, should be on supporting partners with training and development, building trust and loyalty, and maintaining relationships that will inevitably prove critical to future success. ●

