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August 19, 2014 by **Curt Finch, Journyx**   🗨 **No Comments**

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Top 3 Ways to Have the Best ISV to VAR Relationship

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When Great Plains was first released in small town Fargo in 1993, version 1.0 was already a robust product, being one of the first accounting packages designed to be used under a multi-user system. It wasn't until 2001 when Microsoft officially purchased the software that it became what it is today: a flexible, mid-sized, business-focused solution that fosters an organic market for Value Added Resellers (VAR) and Independent Software Vendors (ISV) alike. VARs wanted the best product possible for their clients and ISVs found the perfect new environment for building add-on products. But did they always get along, and how do they keep the partnership working well going forward? We sat down with Brenner Klenzman, CEO of WilloWare, a firm dedicated to helping businesses achieve a positive Return On Investment using Microsoft Dynamics GP, and he gave us his top three tips on how to cultivate a great ISV to VAR partnership.

One Small Step for ISVs…

According to Klenzman, taking the first step of becoming a certified Microsoft Partner and being added to the Microsoft family gives you good name recognition and access to a large network of Microsoft Partners. From there, it helps to know your audience.

"For us, having good relationships with VARs (resellers) has been invaluable. Get in touch with them and show them how your product can solve customer problems," said Klenzman. "Consultants like to be able to say 'YES', and if they know they can count on your product to fill a gap, it makes their life easier, and it makes their customer happy."

As of 2014, 47,000 companies use Microsoft Dynamics GP, with no plans of retiring the ERP solution anytime soon. As an ISV, keeping on top of the latest technological advancements--not to mention the latest updates in Dynamics GP (soon to be on their 2015 release)—will not only make your clients happy but will more than keep the peace with your VAR as well.
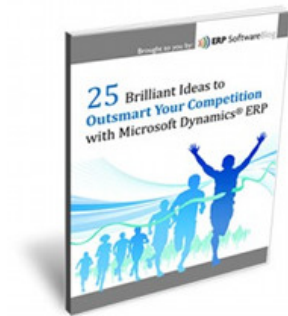
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Oftentimes, it is wise to hone your focus. ISVs should understand where their products are the best fit and VARs might choose to only resell certain Dynamics products that best match their implementation experience. This might be only one Dynamics system, as Willoware has chosen with GP. This allows their focus and expertise to go very deep.

Willoware has tailored their products to only provide enhancements to GP and has brushed aside any thoughts of applying focus to AX or SL. In fact, Willoware's products integrate so seamlessly that many users don't even realize they're leaving GP to do a specific GP-related action.

Being so closely-tied with Microsoft Dynamics GP offers Willoware automatic brand-recognition and a trusted reputation with VARs.

"We've spent 10-plus years learning how to integrate stuff into GP, and we are still learning how to do it. We are learning something new on a regular basis," said Klenzman. "I would envision the learning curve would be the same if we move to AX. So, I have a hard time thinking we could switch over to AX and do what we do as well as we do it with GP. It would take another 10 years."

That kind of focus brings a similarly tight-knit group of VARs that are thought leaders in the GP space and absolutely the most knowledgeable when it comes to which add-ons integrate best with a client's GP needs. And the same exists whether your focus is SL, AX or NAV, as well. Adding your product to that same thought-leader space is absolutely necessary for ensuring successful partnerships with VARs in the Dynamics community.

They Need You, Too

It's a no-brainer that success depends on listening to your customers. Here, Klenzman's advice goes even further by building his business model around listening to customers: if a client wants it, then they make it happen. And that's the way it *should* be.

In the situation of a full ERP implementation, an ISV's role in the process is of absolute importance to both the VARs and the client. While some businesses' needs are met in Microsoft Dynamics as it stands, the higher functionality of the product comes when you develop it. So if you're taking the needs of clients into account in new ways you hadn't before, you might suddenly find yourself completely indispensable to both their solution *and* the VARs.

ISVs and VARs that work together to meet clients' needs will make a formidable team.

The Bottom Line

The point is —the VAR/ISV relationship is symbiotic. You both need each other. According to The Gartner Group, it is estimated that the failure rate for ERP implementations is greater than 50%. A stronger relationship between VARs and ISVs will bring this percentage down. If you have your ear to the ground for what's coming next in Microsoft Dynamics as well as what your customers are facing as they grow, the only thing that can reasonably follow is ERP success.

About the Author: Curt Finch is the CEO of Journyx, a Certified Microsoft Partner. Journyx maximizes the value of Microsoft Dynamics by adding enterprise time tracking. Journyx Accountlink for Microsoft Dynamics allows companies to quickly implement a complete time tracking solution using existing business data in Dynamics. Connect with Curt on Google+.

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