

# IT Solution Providers Focus on the End Customer Buying Experience to Remain Competitive

InterComms interviewed Ittai Bareket, the CEO of Netformx, Lisa Simpson, Head of Channel Sales North America at Alcatel-Lucent Enterprise (ALE) and Steve Rogers, Vice President of Strategic Alliances at Groupware Technology, to learn how IT vendors and systems integrators are modifying their sales processes and incorporating analytics to manage their partner programs and accelerate profitability



#### **Ittai Bareket**

*Under Mr. Bareket's strategic leadership Netformx has become the leader in enterprise sales enablement and profit acceleration platforms. Netformx enables IT solution providers to design and sell winning and implementable multi-vendor solutions to enterprise customers, while operating their businesses profitably. The Netformx suite of applications provides solution providers with powerful business intelligence, actionable insights, collaboration, and automation that connect people, information, and processes. The result is increased competitiveness and productivity across the sales lifecycle.*



#### **Lisa Simpson**

*Ms. Simpson is responsible for the Alcatel-Lucent Enterprise (ALE) Channel Sales and Distribution Strategy in North America. She has rich experience in the telecom and enterprise IT industry and combines her technical knowledge and savvy business development skills for the benefit of ALE business partners and customers. ALE provides enterprise networking, communications and services to over 830,000 customers worldwide. It has more than 2200 employees and 2900 partners who serve over 50 countries.*



#### **Steve Rogers**

*Mr. Rogers is Vice President of Strategic Alliances at Groupware Technology. He is responsible for bringing new solutions to market that enable Sales and Engineering to provide the best possible customer experience, and for the profitable growth of business with the company's strategic technology partners. He has more than 30 years of IT and technology experience. Groupware Technology specializes in data center infrastructure, cloud, security, applications, collaboration, big data, rack integration services and first call support.*

**I**n our previous issue, we spoke with Ittai and Stuart Macintyre, Champion of the Optus Business "Technology Value Proposition", to get a service provider's perspective on the impact of digital transformation and its associated technological

enablers, such as Artificial Intelligence and automation, on sales management and profitability. Today, we focus on how IT vendors and systems integrators are dealing with those opportunities. ▶

**Q: Ittai, since we last spoke have you seen momentum in the market for automating the sales process?**

**A: Ittai:** Yes, we are hearing from more and more solution providers that the only way they can remain competitive is to increase their focus on their end customer, the enterprise, by providing them outstanding service and value. Automation of the repetitive and data-intensive aspects of the sales process enables presales and sales to focus their time on the customer's needs instead of grinding through the details inherent in complex or even straightforward solution designs. And when it comes to profitability management—staying on top of the sales business—analytics and automation are essential to identifying actionable insights that will improve profitability.

**Q: Is your market targeted at large solution providers with a lot of volume?**

**A: Ittai:** No, we are seeing interest from large to small IT vendors, distributors, service providers and systems integrators. Everyone is in the business of improving efficiency and productivity. Optus, ALE, and Groupware Technologies are great examples of the range of solution providers who are seeing value from analytics and automation in the sales process.

**Q: Lisa, ALE must have a large customer and business partner base. What challenges do you face when creating solution designs for all those deals?**

**A: Lisa:** Our Business Partners enable us to leverage the ALE brand throughout North America and to penetrate a variety of vertical markets. While ALE's in-depth technical expertise is generally used to create solution designs, our partners know their customers extremely well. Our solutions range from complex designs for multi-national banks to relatively simple designs for one-branch retail stores. The challenge

is to speed proposal creation while maintaining accuracy of the resulting solution design.

**Q: Do you incorporate automation and analytics to simplify the creation of complex designs?**

**A: Lisa:** In the past, complex designs and proposals were created manually. This was a time-consuming and error-prone process that was dependent on the expertise in the heads of a few experts. It's complex to stay up-to-date on the multitude of products and their specifications and interoperability requirements, let alone the numerous and valuable promotions and incentives that are available. For complex designs the amount of information to be considered is huge and changing all the time. We are using tools such as Netformx DesignXpert that ferrets out and automatically analyzes all that information for us. This simplifies the design process and ensures accurate configurations and error-free implementations. So, we can quickly create end-to-end solutions with everything needed, including design graphics. This is a big differentiator to our customers.

**Q: What about the creation of less complex, more repeatable designs? Do you have an efficient way to automate and simplify them?**

**A: Lisa:** Yes, we are providing our Business Partners with Netformx SalesXpert, an interactive, web-based tool that our partners can use to create and configure customer-specific proposals that meet ALE configuration rules and incorporate accurate pricing and discounting. For repeatable designs, our partners can quickly create designs—even at their customer's location—based on the most current ALE catalog information. Through a collaborative workflow, if needed, ALE Business Partners can upload a project to their ALE Sales Engineer for issue resolution or design modification. This gives our partners the autonomy to quickly create their own designs, while freeing up ALE staff to focus on more complex designs.

**Q: Have you seen benefits in terms of being able to scale your Business Partner community by providing tools to simplify the solution design process?**

**A: Lisa:** Without our sophisticated design tools that simplify and automate the process, we would be swamped by the manual labor involved. This would impact time-to-quote and therefore customer satisfaction, and definitely impact our ability to grow our Business Partner program.

**Q: I know it's still early days, but what's the reaction from your internal teams, business partners, and customers?**

**A: Lisa:** All of our internal teams are using these solutions and their feedback is very positive. The tools are streamlining and expediting the process for creating Bills of Materials (BOMs) for partners and end customers. Our business partners say this approach simplifies the process for them. They can be more efficient and effective and are able to present better pricing for repeatable opportunities



and to drive more sales. Our customers are delighted since they get a BOM and solution much faster from us and from our business partners than they have in the past. That is a big plus for us.

**Q: Steve, as an IT solutions provider, what challenges were you facing that drove you to make changes in the sales process?**

**A: Steve:** Like Lisa, we also have a strong partner program, with more than 50 technology partners. So, a big issue for us was managing and auditing strategic partnerships—staying on top of the overall sales business. I would say that the changes we made were a natural maturation of our Sales and Alliances process, rather than a shift in our overall sales process.

**Q: What is the nature of the changes you made? People? Processes? Management approaches? New tools and technologies?**

**A: Steve:** Previously, our partner management process was handled mainly by our senior executive team and Sales executive leadership. In 2017 we created a dedicated Alliances function to take responsibility for managing strategic partnerships. We adopted Netformx ChannelXpert to provide us more control and audit capability than we had with our previous manual processes.

**Q: Given the large volume of sales, equipment, and promotional data, how do you analyze and manage your sales business and its profitability?**

**A: Steve:** We developed strategic tiers to categorize our partners based on sales volume, strategic direction, and partner investment. In the past we used time-consuming manual processes to piece together ever-changing up-front discounts and back-end rebate programs as well as programs based on employee levels of certification and specialization. With ChannelXpert, opportunities to increase profitability appear as actionable insights in summary dashboards. So, our Alliances and Practice Managers have better visibility into strategic partner programs, such as Cisco VIP, and can quickly make decisions that drive overall partner profitability.

**Q: Do those analyses enable you to automatically gain business intelligence and determine actionable insights?**

**A: Steve:** Without an analysis tool like this, many more hours would be required to manually audit and determine what actions are required to drive profitability.

**Q: Have you seen any benefits? What about your customers?**

**A: Steve:** We have already seen a quick ROI on partner program management and reconciliation. Being able to validate partner programs and have better control is always a good thing. It is just good business to maintain the highest profitability possible. Partners tend to make further investments when it can be shown that a partnership is lucrative and that we are maximizing all the programs.



Likewise, the manufacturer will see value in continuing to invest in those partners that can maintain a solid business. The result to the customer is the satisfaction that they are working with a top tier partner and that they are getting the best possible value for the dollars they are spending on the project.

**Thank you Lisa and Steve. From your experiences it's clear that even though one would expect Sales to focus on personal interactions, beating the competition and working effectively with partners requires a well-oiled sales process that incorporates automation and analytics.**

**Q: Ittai, how do you see the sales enablement market evolving?**

**A: Ittai:** The volumes of data needing to be absorbed to make crisp sales business decisions is continuing to grow. There are more and more vendors, products, and services as well as vendor incentive programs. Automation and analysis will be essential to optimize all that information for increased profitability and win ratios. Also, many more applications are migrating to the Cloud, making it easier for sales teams to take advantage of tools and automation remotely and to collaborate with others as needed. While the underlying complexity keeps growing, technology's role is to mask that and to provide actionable business intelligence (with drill-downs) that can be used to manage the sales business.

**Find out more about Netformx at: [www.netformx.com](http://www.netformx.com)**