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Partnership potential

IBM understands that there is ample benefit to having a strategic network of global business partners. By capitalising on these relationships it is able to deliver high-value technology solutions to its customers across a variety of industries.

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When Marc Dupaquier joined IBM Global Business Partners in January 2014 as the general manager of the channel business, he saw more opportunities than challenges. Responsible for the revenue generated through all of IBM's worldwide channel partners—including distributors, resellers, system integrators, and managed service providers—he was confident that the future would continue to bring great success for the technology giant. Since his appointment, he has played an instrumental role in strengthening these relationships; creating the One Channel Team, launching the IBM Business Transformation Initiative, and also spearheading the specialised curriculum-focused certifications.

Marc says the business division's overall aim is to have the "best high-value channel in the industry" so that Business Partners can engage with IBM to increase their growth and profitability, while also delivering bespoke solutions to clients. "We monitor this very carefully," Marc notes. "We look at how much money the partners make with us and we are always trying to make sure IBM is a highly profitable relationship for them. >>



Marc Dupaquier
IBM
General Manager,
Channel Business
Headquarters in New York, US



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- Marc Dupaquier

“What we do is help them to address opportunities in a very profitable way. We bring them three major differentiations—technology which we believe is unique because of the number of solutions we can provide; client success because the IBM brand is very strong and powerful, therefore they can leverage that to have access to clients; and consistency in the programs that we drive. So we are very committed to the partner and we have been that way for many years. We are very predictable in terms of earnings and our goal is to help our Business Partners be successful. In fact, we actually want to build the highest value channel in the industry and in exchange, of course, partner with the highest margin businesses. We have been very consistent at doing this. The partner recognises this and they rely on our technology offerings, our track record of client success, and our consistency. That’s why I tend to see more opportunities than challenges.”

IBM is a technology and innovation company which has been around for more than a century. It has operations in 170 countries around the world, each working to invent and apply software, hardware, business consulting, and technology services to help forward-thinking enterprises, institutions, and people solve their most complex problems.

Marc has worked for IBM since 1983 when he joined the French subsidiary as a software sales specialist. From there, he worked his way up the ranks and through various leadership roles to eventually become the general manager of Global Business Partners. His immediate role prior to this was as the vice president of



global marketing and strategy for the IBM Systems and Technology Group. Marc clearly knows the business well, and recognises that some of the emerging opportunities for the organisation will be in cloud analytics, mobile, social, and security. In addition to this, he says industry specialisation is another key growth area.

“We are seeing more and more clients engaging with us on new transformation

projects linked to a specific industry. That’s a big opportunity for us and we want to push more industry assets towards our Business Partners depending on what they provide. This can be either related to a specific solution that [partners] can build or it can be something which is very high in value. For example, we have IBM Watson. With this we can completely reinvent the IT we provide for any industry. We collaborate with a large >>



number of companies and developers to help the partner build solutions with their clients and then once they have done that we are able to help them scale it up to meet the needs of even more clients.

"I see cognitive computing and IBM Watson as very important opportunities for our partners. I also believe the cloud is another huge opportunity for partners. Additionally, we have strong opportunities with security, which is becoming something that every client needs to be investing in. I think we have a portfolio now that our partners are comfortable with and are happy to push towards clients. These are the key opportunities in our business and in the businesses of many of our partners, too. We don't ask them to embrace all of these elements but we do ask them to pick their major ones so that we can offer appropriate support in the delivery to customers.

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"All of our Business Partners are transforming, and they are all engaging with us. It all comes back to our technology, our history of client success, and our consistency in all that we do. They praise us for these things and that's really why they have chosen to partner with IBM."

Marc believes that by developing the skills and knowledge of its Business Partners there is a positive run-on effect for IBM. It is therefore a key priority to make various resources and programs available to the employees of its partners. This then allows them to add value, rather than volume, to the products they provide to customers. Marc says education is always the starting point

for discussion when new relationships are established.

"We ask: 'What kind of skills do you have? How many of your people are certified? What kind of classes are they taking?'" Marc notes. "We have heavily invested into education programs for our Business Partners. We are giving them new tools and content, and making the curriculum very visible and easy for them to use. We have something that is called >>



PartnerWorld University—a web-based learning management system delivering online lectures to IBM Business Partners worldwide and tracking their progress along their targeted curriculum. We just launched a new version of that which is very interactive, and accessed through mobile devices. Every employee of the business partner now has a destination to go to learn and grow. The learnings are based on the business plan we have set up with the partner, and there is curriculum for them to work through, until they graduate.

“This tool is incredibly valuable for both IBM and its Business Partners,” Marc continues. “It allows the organisation to push more responsibilities on to the alliance because it equips them with the necessary know-how. Furthermore, it can monitor the progress of client wins, and it can reveal the strengths and weaknesses of staff.” This focus on education and skill-based working has resulted in a number of benefits for IBM, as well as its Business Partners.

“We track our partner’s skills and score them on a number of key offerings. They know their score and what areas they need to improve on. The score is a combination of the number of the people they have, as well as the achievements they have experienced. We call it BPTV [business partner technical vitality] and we know, as a fact, that the business

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partner with the highest BPTV score is actually growing faster than those with lower overall scores. We re-analyse this all the time when we engage with our partners. We have a report every week from the team, and this gives us an overview of about 12,000 business partners located all over the world. It shows us the opportunities that they are working on, the wins they have had, the client satisfaction rating, and the deals they have locked in. It gets updated all of the time.

“We correlate scores with the business’s personal achievements and this is our target. There’s a perfect correlation there and there’s no debate surrounding it. It’s very straightforward. I have been showing this correlation curve to partners in many meetings—they get it, they agree, and the discussion I have with them is that they want help to get the skills and support they need through our programs.”

This approach has clearly demonstrated that the higher the score the business partner achieves, the greater their profitability and success will be. Marc admits that this appears to be true with every partner wherever they may be in the world. “So it’s very simple for my team of Business Partners to understand, they know what they have to do and, at the end of the day, they know that they have to perform.”

Simplifying the business process is something which IBM Business Partners has been heavily investing in since Marc took on the general manager role, although he says there is still room for improvement. A major simplification project is being rolled out across the entire division, bringing together many

different channel organisations and encouraging them to congregate in the one place.

“We have always had multiple tools and approaches,” Marc explains further. “Our DNA was to be incredibly sophisticated, which implies complexity as well. So as part of this improved value proposition to help our partners increase their profit margins, we wanted to make it easier for them to actually do business with us. They now understand the curriculum and the programs that we put in place, how easy is it to have co-marketing with us, how many days it will take to be reimbursed for co-marketing, and so on. We have this overwhelming list of items which we are working very hard at simplifying. Some have already been implemented, like improvements to PartnerWorld University, to give partners increased personalised experience, and other changes will be announced at the IBM PartnerWorld Leadership Conference in February. But, ultimately, we have this incredibly strong focus on the simplification of everything that we do with our business partners.”

At the 2015 PartnerWorld Leadership Conference, IBM announced the launch of the One Channel Team—an initiative to bring simplicity to the channel by helping Business Partners build skills, drive demand, and increase growth as they transform for the future. It aligns the dynamic partner ecosystem, allowing it to provide a broader, more competitive experience for existing corporate allies. From this, partners can capitalise on new market trends such as cloud, analytics, mobile, social, and security. Furthermore, the One Channel Team increases IBM’s focus on the recruitment of new Business

Partners, developers, and ISVs (independent software vendors).

Marc says that IBM is trying to go upstream with its business partner solutions, commoditising its infrastructure and unifying its processes. He has partner relationships with system integrators around the world, many of which have presence in more than one country. “We want to approach these relationships in a highly organised fashion so we have a dedicated team to provide support. We have our partners build their solution using IBM technology and that is an example of us going upstream. In addition, we have tens of thousands of partners who we are helping to evolve from being simply a reseller and into a company which builds its own services and capabilities.”

Also, Marc explains that IBM is trying to push more business from its clients towards its partners, rather than tackling the work itself. “Our view is that in order to be able to serve the client on a given solution there needs to be more coverage. For many of our clients already, our Business Partners are their primary entry. We have IBM resources to support them but when a client is approaching us on a project we tend to have the business partner, I would say with the exception of the top very large clients, take on the job. The business partner is becoming the preferred route that we push for first, and then IBM supports them when they need our help. That’s a good example of us going upstream.”

IBM is committed to helping its Business Partners succeed and grow in the ever-evolving technology space. By taking advantage of its vast portfolio of products and services, its long-running history of client success, and its consistent offering, IBM is able to support its strategic allies as they deliver a high-value solution for customers in a range of industries and all over the world. ■

