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Networks and network infrastructure, the future

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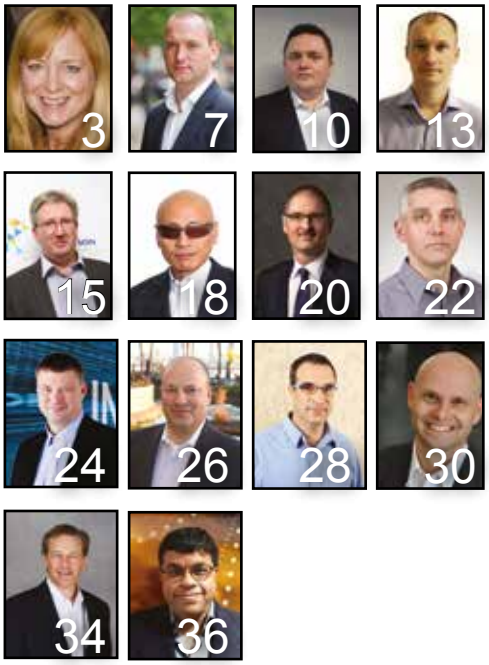

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Powerful business insights increase profits across the enterprise technology sales lifecycle

by Ittai Bareket, CEO, Netformx

Successful solution providers use the power of software to take a business focused, integrated, and collaborative approach to the entire sales process. They use powerful business intelligence, analytics, and automation to gain the actionable insights they need to win more deals, ensure what they sell can be implemented successfully, and maximize profitability.

Ittai Bareket, CEO, Netformx, Inc

Under Mr. Bareket's strategic leadership Netformx has become the leader in enterprise sales enablement and actionable business insights. Netformx accelerates solution provider profits with powerful business intelligence, actionable insights, collaboration, and automation that connect people, information, and processes throughout the enterprise sales lifecycle.

Netformx has over 2,000 service provider, systems integrator, and technology vendor customers in more than 120 countries. They rely on the company's award-winning solutions to design and sell winning and implementable multivendor network, data center, managed, hosted and cloud solutions, while operating their businesses profitably.

Mr. Bareket joined Netformx in 2000 and had responsibility for sales, marketing, and operations before being appointed CEO in the summer of 2005. Previously he held positions at Mercury Interactive Corporation (now HP) including President of Mercury Interactive Japan K.K. and General Manager for Japan and Korea.

Rampant complexity impacts profitability

Communications service providers are hard-pressed these days to manage and monetize the growing complexity that is bombarding them from all directions. Customer expectations for rapid response have never been higher. Technologies are changing continually and becoming more real-time and dynamic. Digital transformation is turning the industry on its head.

Keeping up with this increasingly complex situation poses a sales enablement challenge to IT solution providers, such as carriers, systems integrators, and resellers, who are selling technology-driven business solutions to enterprises. As technology and deployment models evolve, solution providers are struggling to make enterprise sales more profitable. They have to stay up to date on complex, ever-changing offerings and part numbers from multiple vendors. Vendor and distributor promotions have strict compliance requirements that, if not met, can impact gross margins substantially.

In addition, solution providers operating in Europe and Africa must manage certifications, specializations, programs, and promotions that differ by country. If a solution provider fails to notice that by losing a certified employee they may also lose their gold partner status in a country, causing them to forgo all their rebates for that period. This can have a major financial impact.

And, of course, increasing competition has put pressure on margins, leading to the need for higher sales volumes. The race is on with the competition to provide timely, cost-effective proposals and quotes to prospects.

It's easy to get lost in the complexity and not take the time to proactively manage profitability across the sales lifecycle. Yes there are many challenges, but profitability shouldn't be one of them.

Profitability throughout the sales lifecycle
Shrinking margins have necessitated proactive business management of the entire sales process — from the initial customer engagement all the way through to post-delivery.

Managing the sales lifecycle for maximum profitability means being able to answer questions like these:

- Have the customer's evolving requirements been captured accurately?

- How quickly was a proposal generated? Does it reflect the customer needs?
- Is the quote accurate, timely, and competitive? Does it maximize profitability?
- Are manual processes impacting margin?
- Are design and sales teams working collaboratively to create the most profitable solution?
- Will implementation be timely and error-free?
- What is the profitability of a specific deal?
- What specific actions need to be taken to increase profitability?
- How will profitability be impacted if a deal is closed in a specific country?
- Has the deal maximized partner program benefits?
- Is the customer delighted with their end-to-end experience?

Solution providers who can't answer these business questions are probably not maximizing profitability. They may be relying on manual efforts to sort through a maze of supplier, distributor, and internal data to create the proposal and quote. And vendor promotional requirements may not even be considered at all. No wonder deal profitability is hit-or-miss for most solution providers.

Software solutions enable profitability

Software technologies can be major sales enablement assets that increase profitability.

Automation

Automated processes dramatically improve productivity and profitability across the entire sales lifecycle. In addition, by automatically providing suggestions on alternate equipment with higher margins, profitability can be taken into account during the design stage rather than after the fact.

Collaboration

Instead of time-consuming and error-prone sharing of spreadsheets across sales, services, provisioning, and procurement teams, workflows can be orchestrated in real time with automated processes. Data can be shared to eliminate redundant data that easily gets out of sync. In addition, with workflow management, resources are utilized efficiently.

Standardization

By incorporating best practices and enforcing standards, quotes are accurate, repeatable, and consistent and result in error-free implementations that leverage preferred technologies. Software advisors standardize best practices throughout the sales team, increase accuracy, and enable designers to ramp up quickly on new services and technologies. They also reduce training requirements and dependence on experts.

Analytics

Analytics engines have become powerful tools for increasing profitability. They have evolved from simplistic analyses that provide information about what is happening now or in the past to insightful forecasts of what might happen or prescriptive recommendations on actions to take.

Successful solution providers use the power of software to take a business focused, integrated, and collaborative approach to the entire sales process. They use powerful business intelligence, analytics, and automation to gain the actionable insights they need to win more deals, ensure what they sell can be implemented successfully, and maximize profitability.

Sales enablement and profit acceleration

Many individuals and departments are involved within the solution provider, such as Executives, Procurement, Sales, Solution Architects, and Project Managers. In addition, there are vendors and distributors and, of course, the customer. Manually coordinating the activities of all these sales ecosystem participants can be both time-consuming and frustrating, often with less than desirable results such as design errors, long sales cycles, high costs of sale, product returns, reduced productivity, and customer dissatisfaction.

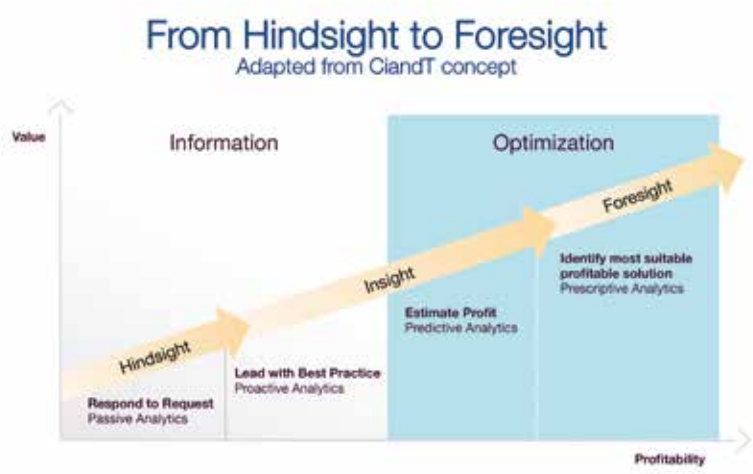
To maximize profitability the collaborative sales ecosystem needs to seamlessly connect people, information, and processes. Then automated processes, prescriptive analytics, cooperating applications, and shared data can increase profitability through the entire sales lifecycle.

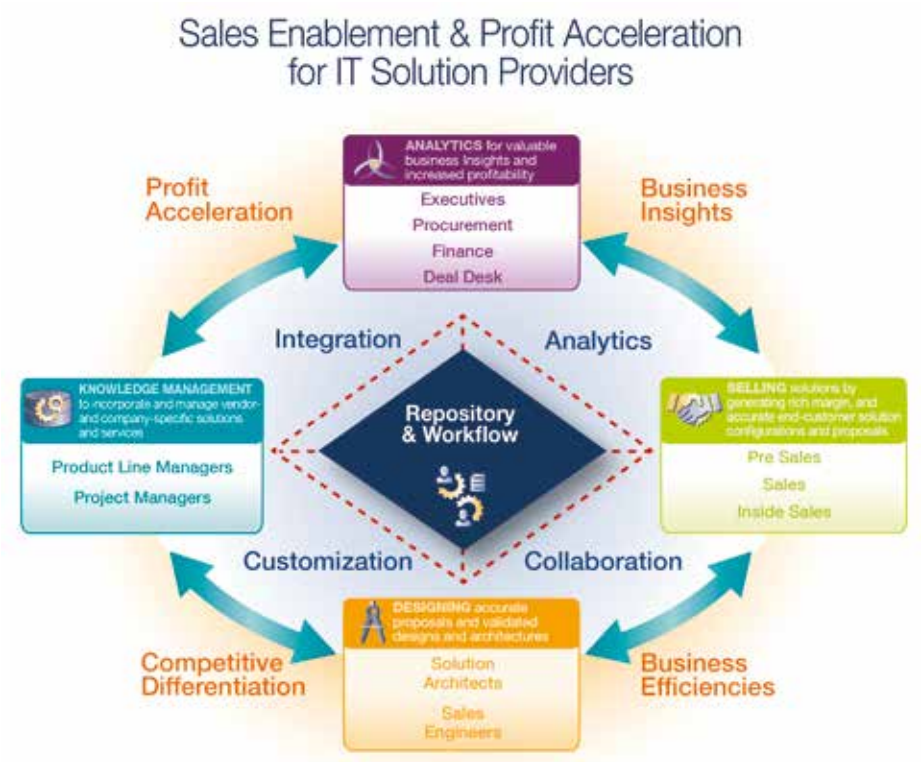
Integration, collaboration, and business insights can be achieved through a SaaS-based repository. Multiple users as well as internal and external applications can work together by sharing a consistent set of enriched and secure data. An integrated sales enablement platform can coordinate workflows to enable efficient management of the sales process and the business.

An automated analytics engine can correlate data sources and then apply sophisticated analytics to generate, in real time, valuable business insights and recommendations. Insights can be incorporated into workflows (such as suggesting to the designer alternate equipment with higher margin) or gleaned quickly in dashboards that enable management to take actions promptly to increase profitability or productivity.

As a result, the design and quoting process is easier to synchronize across sales, design, and sales-operations teams. Design projects, customer data, and so forth are shared as needed via fast workflow processes. Guiding the sales team to solutions that reflect the company's strategy substantially improves productivity and order accuracy. The result is accurate, timely designs and proposals that reflect the customer's requirements.

In addition, Senior Management, Procurement, Deal Desk, and Finance teams can proactively drive profitability with powerful business insights into deals, sales, rebates, and discounts. They get the





information they need to decide where to invest selling efforts, how to recover additional vendor rebates, and which deals require attention by the sales team.

By applying automation and analytics, solution providers gain business insights, increase business efficiencies, gain competitive differentiation, and accelerate profits.

Putting profitability into every step of the sales process

Best-of-breed sales automation solutions combined with business intelligence and analytics have enabled solution providers to increase profitability in areas such as:

Speeding the design process

Margins increase as expenses shrink thanks to reduced needs for human intervention. Using best-of-breed sales automation tools, some solution providers have increased their profitability more than 1% by reducing time-to-quote up to 80% and cutting time-to-market for new products, services, and promotions by as much as 50%. With the right solution, sales team productivity can double.

Integrating vendor incentives in the design process. Designers are prompted with relevant alternatives so they can select comparable parts having higher discounts and see the impact on the customer's budget in real time. This can save 15-30 minutes per device.

Error-free implementations

Automatically incorporating vendor orderability rules and using guided selling advisors results in validated designs that meet vendor specifications. The resulting implementations are generally error-free with near zero order fallout, significantly reducing truck rolls, returned equipment, and service level agreement infractions. Implementation error rates can be reduced by 99%. In addition, solution providers achieve faster revenue realization and high levels of customer satisfaction.

Managing vendor incentive programs. Powerful, analytics-based dashboards and reports enable solution providers to automatically track, analyze, and understand their vendor reward status. Actionable insights ensure that incentive program rebates are maximized before booking orders. This increases margins, so the solution provider can lower prices to become more competitive. Some best-of-breed solutions have identified an average of $5K more margin hidden in the sales process for every $100K in a Bill of Materials.

Tracking and managing deals. A crucial component in optimizing a deal's profitability across its lifecycle is the ability to gain complete visibility into the deals registered, associated programs, as well as their status and margin contribution. Managers who have a view into their order and promotion validation processes can see why deals are not closed and take action to avoid disqualification, registration expiration, or reduced incentives.

Staying on top of business

Successful solution providers take an integrated, collaborative approach to the sales lifecycle that uses powerful business intelligence, analytics, and automation to:

- Win more deals
- Ensure what they sell can be implemented
- Maximize profitability throughout the sales process

Powerful intelligent, integrated solutions bring competitive advantage as well as increased productivity to design, sales, and sales operations teams. So more time can be spent with the customer, not at desktops creating designs, proposals, and quotes.

Automating the management of partners and of vendor reward programs and incentives enables solution providers to capture more reward and promotion dollars. This increased visibility into the profitability of a given deal aids in making better business decisions that proactively increase profitability and drive operational efficiency.

The bottom line: Don't let complexity reduce profitability. Instead, stay on top of business with an analytics-based, automated workflow solution that provides powerful business insights across the sales lifecycle. ●