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Rewriting the Rules of Business

The rules of business - and digital transformation - are being rewritten from the network out. Cisco's solution partners are transforming their business by building digital solutions with Cisco technology, and delivering better business outcomes to their customers. IDC’s channels & alliances team conducted a research study with several of Cisco’s solution partners to understand the value that those partners derive from partnering with Cisco.

This InfoBrief summarizes the key findings from this research as well as sharing insights into the underlying trend of digital transformation, Cisco’s digital solutions for solution partners, and guidance for solution partners to accelerate their success working as a Cisco solution partner.

“Cisco really helped us get visibility where we might not have had it, they gave us credibility in the market, and helped us with brand awareness.”
—Kerry Wright, Director of Marketing and Alliances, Purple
Accelerate the Growth of Your Business with Digital Transformation

Digital transformation (DX) is not just a technology trend, it is at the center of business strategies across all industry segments and markets. Enabled by what IDC calls the ‘3rd Platform’ technologies of social, mobile, analytics, and cloud, DX represents an opportunity for companies to redefine their customers’ and employees’ experience and achieve new levels of productivity.

In a Digital Transformation benchmark survey conducted at the end of 2015, IDC found that 64% of IT customers are at early stages in their digital transformation journey while 22% said they are already at an advanced stage.
IDC expects this advanced number to double over the next two years. IDC also predicts that by the end of 2017, two thirds of the CEOs of Global 2000 enterprises will have DX at the center of their corporate strategy, and that by 2020 almost half of IT budgets will be directly tied to DX. These investments will constitute the majority of growth in technology markets over the next five years and, as such, should become a priority for technology vendors and their partners.

Although it’s fair to say that there are a number of definitions of what DX is, the common theme is that it is causing business disruption, and the impact is accelerating as DX experimentation is going mainstream and creating new business models. DX is becoming a competitive requirement and the source of a massive wave of new investments in digitalizing business operations, communications, and services.

The network is foundational to digital transformation. Cisco has evolved to provide a digital business platform that consists of a comprehensive digital architecture, outcome driven digital solutions and a developer environment supported by a broad global ecosystem of partners. Cisco’s digital architecture brings together data, connectivity, security, automation and analytics to address the whole platform of customer DX needs.
Digital Building Blocks

It is evident that now is the time to learn what’s happening in digital transformation and how you can take advantage of building solutions on world-class technologies. Being on top of the digital transformation trends is key for solution partners, as is driving that message to your customers. The following digital ‘building blocks’ are an example of an integral way for solution partners to align their solutions with Cisco’s strategy and ongoing investments.
Customers are increasingly aware of these technology and business drivers to advance their own businesses and thus it is imperative that this become part of a solution provider’s narrative. 

MORE IMPORTANTLY, IF YOU ARE NOT ADVISING YOUR CUSTOMERS ABOUT DX, SOMEBODY ELSE PROBABLY WILL BE.
IDC Research: Key Benefits Solution Partners Found the Most Valuable

The relationship of a solution partner working with any vendor is an interesting dynamic – unlike a traditional channel or reseller relationship where the transaction of goods is clear both for the vendor and partner, and the revenue/profit share is easily measurable, a solution partner/vendor relationship is more about influenced sales (for the vendor) and enablement (for the solution partner). We asked solution partners what they value most from their relationship with Cisco:

» **Cisco market presence and brand are key drivers** of the relationship. Cisco is seen as a market leader and a credible brand to be associated with.

» **Interoperability Verification Testing (IVT) is a fundamental stage** - demonstrating interoperability with Cisco technologies allows solution partners to promote their products and technologies as “Cisco Compatible”. This accreditation is seen as a seal of approval by solution partners and their customers.

» **In terms of partnering**, providing good support across the journey and having strong partner program assets, **Cisco is seen to ‘get it.’**

» **In terms of sales & marketing**, working with the Cisco field is seen as a **big driver**, as solution partners want to take advantage of Cisco’s reach and market position.
A Successful Cisco Solution Partner Journey Starts with the Solution Partner Program

When you join the Solution Partner Program, Cisco will help you to build, test, market and sell your solutions. Cisco provides an intuitive partner dashboard to allow partners to see their progress in maximizing the utilization of program benefits based on eligibility. This dashboard was cited by a number of partners in the research as being a great tool for them to track their interactions and build success.
After joining the Solution Partner Program, Cisco also provides a clear guide that shares all the benefits associated with the program – which aligns closely to the areas that partners in the research explained were most valuable to them. Cisco has made noticeable efforts to understand the journey that a solution partner will take with them, and the steps laid out in the roadmap are a logical progression to impactful solution selling.

Solution Partner Program dashboard example
Starting the Partner’s Journey

The clarity of structure, and the consistency of messaging around the partner journey, and the “getting started” guide are a refreshing change to partner programs that are often difficult to navigate and consume. Cisco is making the steps clear and simple, which allows their solution partners to focus on the most valuable activities to start their digital journey with Cisco to build & test their solutions, setting up their partner profile, and then using the Cisco go to market assets to market & sell their digital solutions. There are multiple resources to keep you informed including embedded online help with keyword search, Videos On Demand library, Power Hour Webinar Series for Orientations, and automated program update notifications.

“We are able to make better products together with Cisco than we do alone.”
—Thomas Jelle, CEO, MazeMap
Solution Partners Success Roadmap

- **Foundational**
  - Not-For-Resale (NFR) Program: Purchase Cisco product for build, lab, demo purposes
  - DevNet Sandboxes
  - Build Solution

- **Awareness**
  - Solution Approved
  - Solution published in Cisco Marketplace
  - Solution certified Cisco Compatible
  - Awareness via success stories & CRP

- **Increased Amplification**
  - Eligible for Press Release
  - Eligible for Preferred Partner Tier* (24 x 7 support)
  - Share A Success Story: Partner Ecosystem
  - Customer Referral Program (CRP)
  - Financial Incentive for VARs to integrate 3rd Party Solutions into End Customer Deals
  - SIP Approved & Cisco Compatible solutions promoted to VARs via Solutions Showcase
  - Virtual and Live events with shark tank talks and speed networking that connect Solution Partners and VARs

- Value to Ecosystem

Financial Incentive for VARs to integrate 3rd Party Solutions into End Customer Deals

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IDC’s Guidance for Solution Partners

10 Steps to Take to Accelerate the Growth of Your Business

So how does a solution partner develop and accelerate success with Cisco? Based on our research and view of the Cisco Solution Partner Program, it really comes down to engagement by a partner, and the clear structure of the Solution Partner Program that makes the journey well defined.
Step 1: Use Cisco’s DevNet
Get your technical teams to visit the DevNet Community and technology specific websites. You’ll have access to digital technology offers, training and development kits, APIs and sandboxes to build joint solutions with Cisco.

Step 2: Engage early with Cisco’s Solution Partner Program
Understand how Cisco can support your unique journey from build and test through sales and marketing. Use the ‘getting started’ guide and make sure the partner dashboard is your ongoing window to tracking your success.

Step 3: Get Verified
Interoperability verification testing (IVT) is a fundamental building block. Having tested and verified solutions adds credibility with and is a door opener to credibility with customers, and also will help with visibility within Cisco.
Step 4: Get (Digital) Marketing
Promote your solutions on the Cisco Marketplace. Build your custom online storefront for each of your solutions and use Cisco’s go to market assets to market and sell, generate new leads and accelerate your time to market. Use Cisco Marketing Velocity with impactful digital marketing techniques, trends, and resources to drive sales.

Step 5: Accelerate your Sales
Cisco has developed a useful framework — Accelerating Cisco Ecosystem Sales that you can adopt to help you accelerate going to market with partners.

Step 6: Use Partner Connections, Solutions Showcase and Solution Incentive Program (SIP)
Connect with channel partners and offer them an incentive to sell your solution. Nothing amplifies selling more than having others showcase your offering to their customer base.
Step 7: Exhibit at Cisco Live, World of Solutions
Gain access to motivated customers and generate new leads in a highly informative setting. Feedback from such events can be invaluable to fine tune your messaging and outreach.

Step 8: Share your successes
Gain more visibility among Cisco’s ecosystem of partners by submitting a success story, sharing how you delivered a solution to a customer that was based on Cisco technology.

Step 9: Continually use benefits
Review the Solution Partner Program guidelines. Learn about the additional benefits Cisco can offer you. There will always be enhancements and shared learnings/case studies as other solution partners also transform their businesses. Each solution partner has access to a unique events driven dashboard that enables them to easily manage their partner lifecycle activities including their Cisco based solutions and program benefits based on eligibility.
Step 10: Rinse and repeat
Continue to build new solutions, get them tested to become Cisco Compatible, promote on the Cisco Marketplace and create an outreach loop to customers and channel partners.

Partners should view Cisco as an ecosystem – validated and tested digital solutions will open doors to new opportunities to work more closely with Cisco sales and other partners. Invest the time to make new partner connections, market your capabilities and solutions, and drive awareness & opportunity as you engage more deeply.

“We are incredibly committed to the partner community”
—Chuck Robbins, Cisco CEO

Join the Solution Partner Program
Additional Resources

Solution Partner Program Portal

Cisco Marketplace Technology Solutions Catalog

Cisco Marketplace Solutions Showcase

Digital Business Transformation by Cisco

Cisco DevNet