Dec. 01, 2008

From the Dec. 2006 Issue

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How do the nation's leading IT consultants to small businesses feel about the products they help businesses use? These are the professionals who recommend, resell, train and help implement accounting systems, as well as many other business process applications, to the mid-sized and small business market. And since they work hand-in-hand with the users of the programs, vendors often pay close attention to what they think about the technology and the partner programs the vendors provide to assist them.

The CPA Technology Advisor recently partnered with the Information Technology Alliance (ITA) to survey the group's membership on their interaction with software developers and vendor programs geared toward the professional accounting market. ITA is an independent professional association of leading IT consulting firms whose purpose is to share information and build relationships that improve the way its member firms, and their clients, do business. "ITA offers business consultants and VARs excellent resources, especially through networking and knowledge-sharing opportunities at the organization's semiannual conferences," said Ron Eagle, ITA's president. "One of the unique aspects of the ITA is that all members are the principals of their own businesses, not just technical support staff, so the opportunities at our conferences center around the business side of being a reseller or consultancy.

We focus on things like marketplace positioning, branding, strategic alliances, M&As, recruiting strategies, compensation guidelines, sales management processes,

initiatives in product management and quality assurance, and some focus on

partner programs of the vendors of general accounting, construction/contractor, and not-for-profit accounting systems.

Key among the survey's findings is that 86 percent of the survey respondents state that their business partners with or receives referrals from traditional accounting/CPA practices. Most of these professionals also noted that the most important factor when it comes to a vendor's partner program is the product's customization capabilities.

This ability to tailor a system to the specific needs of a core vertical market or general business type is often cited as integral for VARs/recommenders, especially those with niche specialties. Next most important to the survey participants was enhanced revenue streams for growth opportunities, followed by the technical training and support options provided by the vendor, and finally, the availability of easy-to-leverage sales and marketing materials.

Some of the other findings from the survey are presented in the charts on this page. Also note the review of High-End Accounting products in this issue, where ITA member feedback is provided with the respective reviews.

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Technology

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