Enterprise Software & Cloud

Tailoring value to customer needs

Simon Bennett

Business Unit Director for Enterprise Software and Cloud

Simon Bennett, Business Unit Director for Enterprise Software and Cloud at Tech Data, believes that a clear strategy and focus on the customer, along with transformational programmes, platforms that make it easy to do business and a focus on service, will enable both the company and its customers to make a successful journey into the next era of the IT industry's evolution.

When Tech Data decided to bring its Enterprise Software and Cloud businesses together earlier this year – and put its Microsoft business into the same business unit as well – it was hardly a surprise. The future of software is unquestionably in the cloud.

Even so, all these businesses were doing very well in their own right, so it was a bold move and one that has, said Simon Bennett, Business Unit Director for Enterprise Software and Cloud at Tech Data, allowed the company to set out a clear strategy to support sustainable partner development and growth in the future.

'It's a brave thing to do when you have an enormous business that is already profitable – and there was nothing wrong with the structure and the way we were doing business. But in three years' time – when everyone has moved to subscription and to the cloud – our customers' needs will have changed. We see it as part of our role to envision what they are going to need as businesses in two, three, or five years' time.'

The right direction

He continued: 'If you think about the direction of travel for software vendors, they are all moving towards subscription and annuity-based models, so it makes sense for us to bring it all together into one enterprise software business. That gives us and our partners an amazing collaboration opportunity. We now have the largest collection of enterprise tier-one software vendors and public cloud providers in distribution and we believe it's the strongest.'

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The vendor portfolio that now falls under this expanded division is hugely impressive, consisting of just about all the leading names in cloud, virtualisation, datacentre, operating environments and productivity. As well as the familiar names in software and cloud – AWS, Citrix, IBM, Oracle, VMware, Veeam, Veritas and of course, Microsoft, Tech Data works with other more specialist enterprise software houses, such as Micro Focus, Quest and Red Hat.

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The strategic goal for the combined Enterprise Software and Cloud business is 'to be the first-choice partner for aggregating solutions that enable the transformation and acceleration to the third-generation platform.' Tech Data is determined to attain this vision, but can't do that unless it's customers – VARs, service and solutions providers and resellers of all descriptions – can also move in the same direction.

Solutions Practice Builders

Accelerating partner migration to the third platform

Tech Data has recognised that the migration of software business to the cloud presents resellers with the significant challenge of moving to new ways of selling and managing customers and, ultimately, to a very different kind of business model.

To help resellers make the transition, it has devised a Cloud Practice Builder programme. This provides all the expertise and resources resellers need to move from where they are today, to where they need to be in order to build a strong business for the future.

Deborah Pilling, Marketing Manager at Tech Data Advanced Solutions, explained how it works. 'There is an online assessment that will identify their current capabilities and look at where they are planning to go. They will then move on to a transformation workshop at which we will work with them to set out a strategy and plan for them to develop their skills and grow their business.'

As well as strategy development, the core programme elements cover services, sales execution, marketing, and training and enablement. All of these can be tailored and tuned to the specific needs and focus of the reseller – even if that is not a complete transformation.

Simon Bennett said: 'If we want to simply accelerate a partner's business – whether it be for a vendor or a specific area of focus for their business – we can do that. But if they want to transform their business, we can help them by looking at the services and solutions they offer today, reviewing their sales execution, looking at their marketing strategy, and using our people and our resources to train and enable them as a business partner. We can do all of that for them.'

While he acknowledges that some partners have already become MSPs and others that were 'born in the cloud' might not need any assistance, most still need to fill some gaps in their capabilities and the initial responses of partners has been very positive.

He is also confident that Tech Data can bring in all of the right people with the right skills to help them to develop. 'One of the big advantages we have at Tech Data is our extensive vendor and partner ecosystem. If we don't have it ourselves, we can bring the expertise in. We're very confident that we can do that.'

Building partner communities

Initiatives that enable partners to share ideas and experiences

Tech Data brings its reseller partner community together on a frequent basis as a way of understanding their needs and shaping its own strategy and plans. There are several different groups with a specific focus – and more general gatherings as well.

The Tech Data Advanced Solutions Partner programme, for example, brings together mid-market resellers who are looking to develop their own strategic plan, while the Cloud Advisory Board group of resellers and vendors looks at specific enterprise needs, and the Cloud Café forums provide an open and less structured way for all resellers to provide constructive feedback to shape Tech Data's investment and direction.

Through these and other activities, Tech Data is helping partners to build mutually-beneficial relationships and interactions. It is also taking on-board a continuous stream of feedback to ensure it makes investments where they will have the most positive impact for resellers.

Clear strategy

Since bringing the software and cloud businesses together, Tech Data has been setting out a strategy that will enable partners and customers to transform their businesses for a market in which the cloud and subscriptions will dominate, and emerging technologies, such as analytics, Big Data and IoT, will become the new areas of growth potential.

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Simon Bennett said: 'We have a clear strategy and direction and we'll be focusing strongly on our customers, on delivering innovation and simplicity, and helping partners to drive demand. We want to enable our customers to manage the whole lifecycle for end-user organisations – from buying solutions, to implementing and adopting the technology, and then expanding and renewing that solution or service.'

While this all makes perfect sense, it's hard to understate the enormity of the commitment Tech Data has made in bringing these teams together.

Value-oriented

In terms of its strategic direction, the business has been more oriented towards value and partner enablement for some time now. It all links into Tech Data's Trusted Advisor approach that aims to enable and support partners in delivering solutions and helping end-user customers to fully-adopt and drive maximum value from their technology investments.

With the strategy, programmes and platforms it is now bringing forward for the Enterprise Software and Cloud business, it will move the focus of its people and customer engagement towards the delivery of specialism and value, while making the everyday processes, such as quoting, ordering provisioning and billing, much simpler and more efficient for resellers and service providers.

To that end, the company is investing strongly in its own people and in its platforms. The starting point, said Simon Bennett, is to make it very easy to do business with Tech Data on software and cloud. But this will be, he emphasised, a continuous process.

Simplification

'By making it one business for enterprise software and the cloud, we are giving resellers simpler routes into the organisation and that is not going to stop, we see that as an evolution. We are going to simplify, simplify, simplify – remove cycles, remove touch points, make things more automated, make more use of our platforms.'

Platforms are vitally important, he stressed, as they make it much easier and faster to get the basics done – which means the partner and Tech Data can concentrate on the value part of the interaction.

'You already know what you want when you go on Amazon – you only need help when you ask for it and that's the approach we are taking. It's a marketplace mentality. We need to make it easy for you to buy, for instance, 50 VMware licences, but also to get expert help when you need it. We want to make that accessible and we are doing a lot of work on that now.'

One example of innovation here is the Chatbot facility that Tech Data has introduced on the InTouch platform. It has also put a big investment into the development of its dedicated Software Stores, of which there are now ten, with more in progress. Massive investment is also being made in the next version of its StreamOne cloud aggregation platform.

Enabling and accelerating

Other initiatives focus on partner enablement and acceleration. These include the Cloud Practice Builder and various vendor-focused Accelerator programmes. There are also a number of schemes that bring partners together to exchange ideas and feedback – Tech Data Advance, the Cloud Advisory Board and Cloud Café, for example.

Further down the line, Tech Data plans to help partners generate demand for their managed and professional services. To make this work, Simon Bennett believes Tech Data will first of all need to get its platforms and processes in place – which is why the investment is going into those systems now – and then work with partners that have the ambition and desire to grow their business.

'They need to be expanding their offering to their customers. And if we are easy to do business with and obsessed with what they need as customers – and with what their end-user customers need – then we can be pretty confident that they are going to be more successful.'

StreamOne
The next generation is coming

The StreamOne cloud aggregation platform is at the very heart of Tech Data's plans to make it easier and more automated and cost-efficient for partners to provide cloud solutions and services and to manage customers. The present platform is split in two – StreamOne Marketplace providing access to subscription services, StreamOne Enterprise providing added capabilities for complex IaaS and PaaS workloads with robust billing and management tools.

Tech Data has been working on a combined and enhanced version of the platform that will bring these two systems together and provide cloud partners with a comprehensive portal through which all customer subscriptions can be provisioned, monitored, managed and billed-for – efficiently and accurately. There will be open APIs, allowing partners to directly integrate with the platform. StreamOne 'TNG' will also provide a vehicle for ISVs and partners to offer their own cloud solutions and services offerings, so it will act as a central marketplace.

Software Stores
Making it easier to find, provision and sell software

As part of the ongoing development of its online tools, Tech Data has been developing vendor-specific Software Stores, ten of which are now live. These dedicated portals make ordering and license tracking easier and enable resellers to deliver a faster, more efficient service to end-user customers.

The Software Stores give resellers a slick, efficient and simple way to build quotations, place orders and manage licenses and subscriptions for key software vendors. In doing so, the Software Stores ensure resellers do not miss out on renewals, save time and are able to deliver higher levels of customer service.

An intelligent rules-based engine validates options, quotes and orders as they are built. There are now Software Stores for Acronis, Adobe, AutoCAD, Microsoft, Nuance, Red Hat, Veeam and VMware.

Making a difference

Simon Bennett believes the customer- and services-led ethos will make a real difference. 'We don't believe anyone can do all of what we do to the same quality and consistency. But beyond that we believe it's our platforms – like Software Store and StreamOne – and being solutions and services-led. Our strategy is clear, and we have the organisation, the structure and the people in place to do all of that. We just need to execute.'

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There are two Jeff Bezos quotes that he believes are relevant to what Tech Data is doing today with its Enterprise Software and Cloud business. In the first, Amazon's boss said: 'The most important single thing is to focus obsessively on the customer. Our goal is to be earth's most customer-centric company'. The other relates to competition. 'If you're competitor-focused, you have to wait until there is a competitor doing something. Being customer-focused allows you to be more pioneering.'

The intent with the Enterprise Software and Cloud business is to live by these axioms. Simon Bennett said: 'That is the mentality. We are not so worried about what the competition is doing. We are going to be doing what our customers are asking us to do – and if anyone else is doing the same, we will do it better.'

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Tech Data, he believes, is uniquely placed to help partners move to the third platform era. 'Nobody can do everything we can do when we put it all together. Everyone has a platform, specialist people and vendor partnerships, but our belief is that no-one has put all that together and then executed it really well for the customer. What we care about is what our customers are asking us for, and we want to tailor our value to their needs.'

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Interested in finding out more and engaging with Tech Data for Enterprise Software and Cloud?
Book a test drive of StreamOne or join the Cloud Practice Builder Programme – contact our specialist Cloud team at **TDCloudUK@techdata.com**, call **0845 356 3033** or visit **www.techdatacloud.co.uk**