

Channel PartnersTM

Fall 2018
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**MSP 501
2018 Award
Winners**

**Steal This:
7 Big Ideas
From the 501**

**Security &
Channel: Our
Exclusive Survey**

**Dell EMC's Cook:
'Always About
the Team'**

ENSONO'S EMPATHIZER- IN-CHIEF

**How Jeff VonDeylen
found his ideal
customer and built
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Editorial

ART WITTMANN

SVP, Content, TMT Technology and Connected Innovations
art.wittmann@informa.com

T.C. DOYLE

Senior Director of Content, Channel Futures & Channel Partners
tc.doyle@knect365.com

LORNA GAREY

Editor-in-Chief, Channel Futures & Channel Partners
lorna.garey@informa.com

CRAIG GALBRAITH

Executive Editor, Channel Futures & Channel Partners
craig.galbraith@informa.com

BUFFY NAYLOR

Managing Editor, Channel Futures & Channel Partners
buffy.naylor@informa.com

KRIS BLACKMON

Content Director, MSPs/VARs, Channel Futures & Channel Partners
kris.blackmon@knect365.com

LYNN HABER

Content Director, IT Channel, Channel Futures & Channel Partners
lynn.haber@informa.com

JAMES ANDERSON

News Editor, Channel Futures & Channel Partners
james.d.anderson@informa.com

EDWARD GATELY

News Editor, Channel Futures & Channel Partners
edwardgately10@gmail.com

FRANK J. OHLHORST

Editor-at-Large, Channel Futures & Channel Partners

JEFFREY SCHWARTZ

Editor-at-Large, Channel Futures & Channel Partners

TODD R. WEISS

Editor-at-Large, Channel Futures & Channel Partners

JESSICA ACKERMAN

Education Manager, Channel Futures & Channel Partners
jessica.ackerman@informa.com

GINETTE ANDRE

Conference Operations & Marketing Intern

Sales

KELLY DANZIGER

Market Leader, Channel
kelly.danziger@knect365.com, +1 203 295 8416

Event Sales

SIERRA COUGHLIN

Sales Operations Manager
sierra.coughlin@informa.com, +1 480 281 6089

THOMAS BAKER

Director, Sales
thomas.baker@informa.com, +1 602 463 0088

KEVIN MORRIS

Director, Business Development
kevin.morris@informa.com, +1 202 568 0974

CJ FOSTER

Senior Account Executive
cj.foster@informa.com, +1 303 907 7986

Media Sales

TRACI VERBAARSCHOTT

Client Support Manager
traci.verbaarschott@knect365.com, +1 424 465 6510

KIMBERLY DANIELS

Regional/Territory Account Manager, West
kimberly.daniels@knect365.com, +1 951 506 7572

NANCY JO WIGGIN-HAUK

Regional/Territory Account Manager, East
nancyjo.hauk@knect365.com, +1 216 931 9248

Marketing

BRITTANY WATTS

Head of Marketing

KATIE EGLEY

Media Marketing Manager

JESSIE TRUSCIO

Marketing Manager

Events

SARAH WASCHLER

Operations Director, US

JESSICA BARRERAS

Event Program Manager

JEAN CADWELL

Exhibit Operations Manager

JENNIFER NORTON

Event Manager

LAURIEL WRIGHT

Operations Coordinator

Corporate

CAROLYN DAWSON Managing Director, TMT, Telecoms

RUSSELL BACON Global Commercial Director, Telecoms

Published by Informa Exhibitions LLC

2020 N. Central Ave., Suite 400

Phoenix, AZ 85004

+1 480 990 1101

Email: CPOnline@informa.com

Web: channelpartnersonline.com



NO LIE: #CPEVOLUTION WILL ROCK PHILADELPHIA

A few years ago, we changed the name of our East Coast conference and expo from “Cloud Partners” to “Channel Partners Evolution.” We did so because cloud had become a fact of life for partners — it’s just the way IT was, and is, being delivered.

The fall show, if we’re being honest, looked a lot like a smaller version of spring. It’s fair to say that the “Evolution” moniker was aspirational.

Well, I’m officially declaring that #CPEvolution 2018, held Oct. 9 – 12 in Philadelphia, has shed its little-brother status and emerged with a big new personality that melds the best the combined channel has to offer. You’ll see some of that swagger in these pages. If you want to experience it yourself, here are three happenings that embody the show’s grown-up focus:

Our first MSP 501 Awards Reception: This is the capstone of months of hard work by MSP whisperer Kris Blackmon, who will deliver a well-earned toast to our winners. The evening will kick off at 6:30 with a cocktail reception, followed by dinner; presentation of special awards, including MSP of the Year; and an after party. You can meet the three MSPoY 2018 finalists on Page 12.

Fun fact: About one-third of our Channel Partners 360° winners are also on the MSP 501 list.

Two colocated trainings: Avant is bringing its intensive Special Forces Training to #CPEvolution on Tuesday, starting with a welcome lunch at noon and ending with a cocktail and networking reception. And on Wednesday, you can join Datto for a Cyber Security Summit, beginning at 8 a.m. and ending just in time for the expo hall opening at 4 p.m. Datto’s focus is on helping partners remove the security barriers that keep customers from pursuing new business opportunities. We’re thrilled to welcome Avant and Datto to our education lineup.

Channel Futures Theater: Partners who’ve attended one of our sister shows, such as IoT World or 5G World Summit, likely saw some great content at the show floor stages. We’re stealing the idea of using a central stage as a community gathering place, where all attendees can get access to smart content. (Heads up that our ThunderDome on RMM systems already has more than 100 RSVPs, so if that interests you, get there early to grab a seat up close.)

You’ll still find familiar sessions, including the Alliance of Channel Women networking reception; our Golf Invitational; three conference tracks — Business Strategy, Revenue & Supplier Portfolio and Marketing & Tech; thought-provoking keynotes; our veteran’s initiative with TrainOurTroops; and 100,000 or so square feet of exhibition space to explore.

Newbies to the show shouldn’t miss our First-Time Attendee Reception at the truly impressive Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, directly adjacent to the Convention Center. PAFA holds one of the premier collections of American art in the world, including both Charles Willson Peale’s portrait of George Washington at Princeton and Gilbert Stuart’s iconic Lansdowne Portrait of our first president. We’re pretty humbled at the opportunity to offer our attendees a private showing of this amazing collection, which blends old and new American masterpieces.

And finally, a shout-out to our Channel NX2Z group, which bridges Boomers, Gen X, Millennials and Gen Z, whose oldest members are graduating college and entering the workforce. NX2Z is approaching 200 members and growing fast. You’ll find an interview with four of the groups’ leaders beginning on Page 34, and you can meet up with them at our Business Innovation Hackathon on Tuesday, or at the Workforce of the Future Symposium they’re hosting on Wednesday evening. You can learn how to attract, retain and motivate recent grads. Younger channel pros will get career advice from established executives Tiffani Bova, Jason Bystrak and Hilary Gadda.

If you can’t make it to the show next month, this issue will give you a feel for the new #CPEvolution. But I hope you will join me and some 3,500 of your peers. See you in Philly.

Lorna Garey is editor-in-chief of Channel Futures and Channel Partners. Follow her on Twitter @LornaGarey

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STATE OF SECURITY DENIAL

Just how vulnerable are your customers? Our new data reveals some major disconnects between partners and IT pros **By Edward Gately**



First and foremost, we're focused on security education," says Brian Teater, IT manager at EXP Consulting, who adds that end-user training tends to be underfunded and overlooked.

Our 2018 IT Security Trends Survey backs up Teater's stance that one-off webinars can't arm users against sophisticated attackers. And that may be one reason 41 percent of channel respondents say their customers are somewhat or much more vulnerable now versus last year.

That's bad news for them — and their partners.

"If a customer gets owned or ransomed, it reflects badly on us, even though 99 percent of the time it's an end user being careless," said one channel survey respondent.

And customers are either in denial or know something partners don't, based on our comparison of some 50 channel partners weighing in among 359 total respondents. Specifically, we matched channel results up against those from enterprise IT professionals. Despite constant reports of breaches and vulnerabilities, IT pro respondents, for the most part, feel pretty confident: 55 percent said their companies are

much or somewhat less vulnerable in 2018 than last year. Just 11 percent said they are somewhat or much more vulnerable versus that 41 percent of partners.

Who's right?

It's a matter of perspective, with POV dependent on where workloads are hosted and whether defenders know what to look for as attacks get more sophisticated and stealthy.

"We are seeing slowly increasing openness to cloud, and especially hybrid-based solutions, which means a lot more focus on data protection as well as cloud providers' security measures," said David Stevenson,

CSO at software and hardware design services provider Sopris Technologies. “Our customers run MSP and cloud services from their data centers, so [they’re] constantly under attack.”

Can’t Sleep?

A wide range of concerns keep our channel respondents up at night. Some woes, like inadequate system redundancy and difficulty finding and keeping security talent, are largely the result of budget constraints. Others, like administrative rights mixed with unrestricted internet access, could be fixed by better education of both customer IT staffs and end users.

“The No. 1 security worry that keeps me up at night would be a cyberattack in which our internal network is breached, with sensitive information being compromised through an attack on one of our legacy applications,” Teater said. “However, my organization has a plan in place that has been thoroughly developed, reviewed and implemented by a team of cybersecurity experts as well as our own IT department. Oh yeah, I

What percentage of your customers have what your firm considers a reasonably comprehensive set of security products, practices and policies in place?



Source: 2018 IT Security Trends Survey, Channel Respondents

almost forgot about that cloud application that has been self-deployed within departments, without any knowledge by the IT team. Now that is another worry that keeps me up at night!”

Steve Shaw, director of sales and marketing with McMillan Consulting, cited concerns that clients don’t have a good disaster recovery strategy or breach remediation plan, while Sopris’ Stevenson looks closer to home.

“Exposing any customer data” is worry No. 1, he said.

We asked partners about obstacles to improved IT security at customer organizations: 14 percent said attackers are more sophisticated; 12 percent pine for a more security-aware organizational culture; and 10 percent say customers are unwilling to outsource security functions that partners could perform more effectively.

Interestingly, partners are significantly more open to a best-of-breed approach and are more satisfied with the tools available from suppliers versus IT pro respondents.

When asked if their customers had experienced a breach in the past year, 45 percent of partners said yes, with an additional 27 percent admitting they’re unsure. The top three outcomes of breaches: significant lost revenue, one or more suppliers were replaced and — proving that clouds do have silver linings — improvements in security awareness. Among our IT pro respondents who were breached, 73 percent said the event improved their security culture, while 41 percent said it caused temporary damage to their firms’ reputations and 29 percent cited a loss in revenue.

Partner Prospects

We circled back to IT pro responses to uncover opportunities for partners. Three key points:

Cloud needs controls: When asked whether their organizations store data in public clouds, such as AWS or Azure, 62 percent said yes. However, their security plans leave something to be desired. When asked about a security strategy for workloads running

About Our Survey

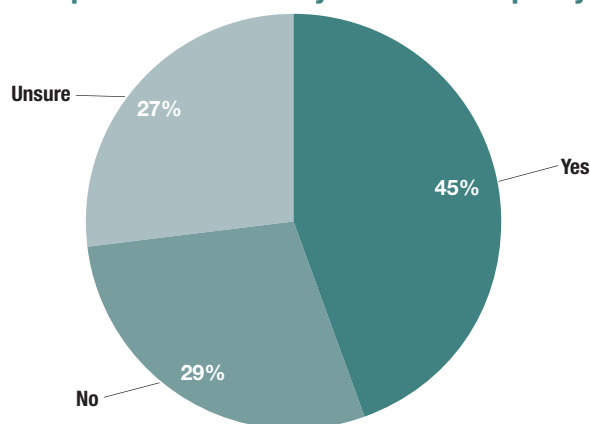
Channel Partners, Channel Futures and our sister sites ITPro Today and DataCenter Knowledge combined forces on our 2018 IT Security Trends Survey. Some 359 respondents took part in the survey. Of those, 48 were channel professionals, mostly consultants, agents/subagents, MSPs, masters and VARs.

Nearly half of respondents said IT or data center network security is one of their areas of responsibility, while 69 percent said security makes up a big part of their firm’s business.

Watch for full results soon on Channel Partners Online.

Sneak Peek: IT Security Trends Survey

Has a customer experienced a security breach in the past year?



Figures do not equal 100% due to rounding.
Source: 2018 IT Security Trends Survey, Channel Respondents

in the cloud, 42 percent said they treat these workloads the same as if they were on-premises, 33 percent said they rely on their cloud providers to handle security for the full stack and just 11 percent use specialized solutions, such as a cloud access security broker.

None of this inspires confidence.

IoT new shadow IT? We asked whether IT pros have a strategy to secure IoT data and devices; 28 percent said they do, 26 percent said they don't, while the rest insist they are not using IoT.

Maybe they aren't, but maybe they are. Rogue IT isn't just for cloud services.

When asked to describe their coping strategies for IoT security, responses ranged from "we are limiting non-approved products from entering our network," to "we have designed homegrown IoT communication encryption."

Best of luck with that.

Education is critical: Most, 52 percent, say that employees lacking security awareness are a well-recognized threat to their organizations. The next most feared is organized cybercriminals at 16 percent

and low-skilled but persistent attackers using malware-as-a-service at 10 percent. Yet education and training are inconsistently applied.

In all of these cases, partners can help.

As for IT security products used by their organizations, two-thirds have third-party malware detection/antivirus and encryption in place, but just above half, 58 percent, utilize Wi-Fi access control/configuration software.

Given growth in employee demand for wireless access, that's a problem.

As for security best practices used in

their organizations, strong passwords, end-user security awareness training, network segmentation and monitoring employee behavior are popular, and again, lend themselves to value-added managed services.

Partners recognize the need: Just 12 percent said more than half of their customers have "reasonably comprehensive" security products, practices and policies.

The good news is, both the need and the budget are there: 51 percent of enterprise respondents say they will spend more on security in 2019, and 45 percent expect spending to remain the same. Only 3 percent foresee a decrease in spending.

On the channel side, 22 percent of respondents expect customer spending to increase significantly, while 78 percent say it will increase somewhat or remain the same. No channel respondents predicted a decrease.

Edward Gately is news editor for Channel Futures and Channel Partners.

 [linkedin.com/in/edward-gately-87200254](https://www.linkedin.com/in/edward-gately-87200254)

 @edwardgately

How do you expect customer spending on security in 2019 to compare with 2018?

Increase significantly

22%

Increase somewhat

52%

Stay about the same

26%

Decrease somewhat

0%

Decrease significantly

0%

Source: 2018 IT Security Trends Survey, Channel Respondents



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2018 MSP 501 AWARD WINNERS: FRESH FACES. BIG REVENUES. SMART TECHNOLOGIES



By Kris Blackmon

When the MSPmentor list debuted in 2007, we were living in a whole other world. Smartphones and social media were in their infancy. Microsoft Vista was a hot topic. Mobile capabilities weren't even a thing, and vendors essentially called all the shots. Back then, the list was based on the surface-level data most MSPs had available. VARs were just starting to really make hay of managed services, and the trends the survey revealed said far more about the solutions vendors were pushing than the opportunities MSPs wanted to explore. In that way, the evolution of the 501 mirrors that of the channel itself, telling a story about the changing nature of IT and the rising importance of managed services in an age of digital transformation.

This year brought a much-needed, updated user experience and some fresh voices. Just as our site and coverage have grown more modern and diverse this year, so too has the MSP 501. 2018 brought the largest and most diverse pool of applicants ever. We saw winners from Colombia to Canada, Sweden to the States, from one-man shops to organizations of more than 4,000 employees. This year's 501 reported a combined revenue of \$14.5 billion, with nearly \$3 billion of that in recurring services.

It's also a banner year for insights from the 501 data itself, which will be packaged and released this fall. We're three years into our new methodology, which weights revenue streams according to the impact they have on the health of the overall business. That means we now have enough data to crunch for historical purposes, too. There are lots of juicy trends that tell the story of the evolving channel,

including consolidation and the rise of M&A; the critical role peer groups play for successful MSPs; proof that resale is not, in fact, dead; the top verticals and lines of business winning MSPs service — if they have a specialty focus at all; and what's driving the cybersecurity market today (hint: phishing attacks totally work).

Also new in 2018 is a gala to celebrate our 501 winners at Channel Partners Evolution, held this October in Philadelphia. Here, winners will have the chance to network, meet our editorial team and take a victory lap. We'll honor eight special award winners, many of whom you'll meet in the following pages. These companies represent the best and the brightest in the MSP 501 and have demonstrated excellence in areas such as intellectual property development, resiliency and, of course, guiding customers through digital transformation.

In the last 11 years, the MSP 501 has evolved from a ranking of a handful of partners to an insightful, data-rich full report that does more than name the top MSPs in the world; it shows you how they got there. I am proud of the diversity of partners we showcase here, and I hope you enjoy reading about them as much as we liked writing about them.

Kris Blackmon is content director, MSP and VAR, for Channel Futures and Channel Partners.

 [linkedin.com/in/kristyblackmon](https://www.linkedin.com/in/kristyblackmon)

 [@kristility](https://twitter.com/kristility)

EXEC OF THE YEAR: JEFF VONDEYLEN

Wish you could press “pause” for just a few minutes to catch your breath, and your balance, before diving back into the madcap business of managing the world’s digital transformation? Sorry, change isn’t going to stop coming for us. So many seismic shifts are happening in business and technology right now that a state of upheaval is beginning to feel almost normal — and the risk of feeling overwhelmed or disconnected is sky-high. So what’s the answer?

Jeff VonDeylen, CEO of Ensono, says there’s one characteristic essential to surviving disruption, and what it is might surprise you: empathy.

VonDeylen, our 2018 recipient of the Channel Futures MSP 501 Executive of the Year Award, has learned that understanding the moods and motivations of his team is critical to successfully leading an organization. That goes double in times of great change, which almost always breed apprehension. He should know: In 2016, VonDeylen took the helm at Ensono, which had just spun off from parent company and database marketing provider Axiom. He came in with a vision of a new kind of IT services company, one he wanted to help create.

That vision, it turns out, wasn’t quite as solid as he hoped.

“We came into the business three years ago,” said VonDeylen. “We didn’t know a lot about this, and we’ve had to adjust, modify, really sharpen our focus and our efforts along the way.”

In 2015, what was then Axiom IT existed to provide IT infrastructure management to one of the largest commercial databases of consumer



Ensono CEO Jeff VonDeylen shares his key to surviving change.

data in the world. When that division broke free, rebranding itself as Ensono in January 2016, it brought with it a deep understanding of mainframe support and a solid client roster. It also had ambitions to become a big player in marketing and cloud technologies. As you can imagine, the company’s expertise and its vision didn’t quite go hand in hand.

VonDeylen found himself leading a company with an identity in flux during a time of upheaval in the IT industry. What’s more, there was a general downtrodden spirit among Ensono’s people, who for years had felt undervalued at Axiom and excluded from the digital marketing company’s grand vision of the future. Perhaps because it was so eager to harness that particular brand of energy, which seems to buoy so many cloud-based digital services providers like Axiom, Ensono was, in the beginning, focused on modernization and cloud enablement.

Its deep expertise in legacy applications seemed like old news. Weren’t clients just going to migrate off of mainframe servers next week, anyway?

“There is a lot of modernization going on, and innovation, and that’s typically happening in and distributed in public cloud,” said VonDeylen. “But what we’re seeing is that there are many of these legacy applications that our clients have no stated objective to migrate off. They need help in providing that capability.”

That was a big lesson in business empathy. Ensono took a step back, listened to the market and tried to understand what it needed. Today, VonDeylen says the company has married its mainframe and modernization expertise to create a truly differentiated space for itself. There are some young, exciting companies out there that are only thinking about public cloud. As great as they are, those companies are not Ensono’s target clients. Rather, VonDeylen and his team want the long-established organizations with a set of applications and infrastructure developed over the course of decades. Such systems can be messy and laden with technical debt, but they’re the perfect blend of critical applications that have to stay the same and opportunities for new development efforts for Ensono. Such clients are its sweet spot.

“Our ability to deal with both is, I think, different, and frankly it’s why we win,” said VonDeylen. “We go at clients that have that problem. It’s a less crowded field than if I’m only talking to someone who’s just on the ‘right side’ of that paradigm.”

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13

2018 MSP OF THE YEAR NOMINEES

The MSP of the Year selection process works a little differently from the other special 501 awards. We narrowed the field of contenders down to three finalists that we feel represent the modern channel and display excellence in both business efficiency and business model innovation. What does that mean? For starters, the nimbleness to pivot to embrace industry trends, the guts to make risky moves today to position the business for tomorrow and the discipline to structure operations to achieve maximum efficiency in service delivery. These three finalists, in their own unique ways, exemplify this ideal. Our 2018 MSP of the Year will be announced at Channel Partners Evolution and spotlighted on Channel Futures, so stay tuned to find out if your favorite candidate took home the prize.

#44: Cal Net Technology Group

It's all about consistency and repeatability at Cal Net, which is based in Los Angeles and services the Southern California market. From its product offerings and solutions to its employee development and best practices, the MSP liberally leverages software to drive operational efficiencies across the entire value chain. The result? Faster, more accurate development processes, better customer service and more trusting client relationships. Cal Net also recently productized its services and added full transparency into its pricing models, listing its prices right on its website. It's an unconventional move for an MSP, but as Cal Net says, when today's customers see no price, they think it's got to be too expensive. Its sales cycles might be a bit

longer, but the leads it's bringing in are more qualified, and its offerings are now scalable to fit a fast-growing market. The same goes for its DevOps processes, which work exactly the same in each of its three locations. Cal Net's pursuit of efficiency through a complete operational overhaul earned it the honor of being a finalist for the 2018 MSP of the Year Award.

#186: Premier Technology Solutions

At the end of 2016, Australia-based Premier Technology Solutions bit the bullet and implemented a huge change to its business model. It was wasting too much time and energy on clients that didn't add enough to the bottom line and were hampering its transition to monthly recurring revenue. Premier knew it needed a bold move, so in January 2017, it took a deep breath and reduced its client base from 330 customers to just 107, knowing full well that the gamble would reduce its monthly revenue by about \$80,000 AUD. After shedding clients that were holding it back, Premier was able to streamline its processes, operations and sales focus. Over the course of 2017, the MSP grew its revenue by \$1.5 million AUD. It's about doubled its MRR, average agreement size and average per-user price for new agreements. The move tripled its profit margin because of internal efficiencies, too. Revenue per tech rocketed from \$165,500 AUD to \$313,500 AUD, resolution times dropped by 30 percent and service desk response times plummeted 70 percent. It takes business savvy to identify what's holding an MSP back and a willingness to take risks to overcome those obstacles. Premier nabbed a finalist spot for MSP

of the Year by demonstrating a perfect balance between the two, with results to prove it.

#501: SabinoCompTech LLC

You might think sliding into the 501st spot on a ranking list of 501 MSPs would render SabinoCompTech just a slightly above average managed service provider. You'd be wrong. Angel and Nancy Sabino started their shop in 2008 when they were just 22 years old, and they demonstrate the modern channel's transformation. The Sabinos experimented with different models and customer types to find the right fit for their Katy, Texas, MSP. SabinoCompTech tried everything from break/fix for small businesses to retail residential services before finally transitioning to a managed services recurring revenue model in 2016. The MSP also experimented with different pricing models before landing on an all-inclusive plan at a higher price point, which gives customers visibility into the services they're paying for. To make that switch worth it, the Sabinos had to work hard and fast to create both internal and client-facing operational efficiencies so they didn't hemorrhage profit. Today, SabinoCompTech's business shows it's landed on a formula that works. It's created a vertical focus, which allows it to provide standard, repeatable offerings that can scale and allow quick time to resolution, since techs know just what to look for. As millennials of Hispanic descent, the Sabinos epitomize young, agile channel partners who aren't afraid to pivot on the fly. It's DevOps in action, and it put the small service provider in the running for MSP of the Year.

—Kris Blackmon

EXEC OF THE YEAR (CONT.)

In the last three years, VonDeylen has overseen a series of acquisitions designed to strengthen Ensono's hold on that target market, including buying Wipro Limited's Hosted Data Center Services (DCS) business in the United States, Europe and Singapore just this summer. The move nearly doubled Ensono's size, adding 900 employees to its roster, and shot its annual revenue up to more than \$550 million.

In a company that large, that's growing that quickly, maintaining employee empathy seems prohibitively challenging. It's also never more critical.

"As a leader, I'm as good as the people that are working with me," said VonDeylen. "We have 2,100 associates now, and we're going to be a great

company — if we get all those folks understanding what we're trying to do and aligned around how we're going to do it."

Change, he says, brings apprehension. Will my skill set still be valuable? Will there be budget for my position? Will I change teams or get a different supervisor? These worries can be exacerbated at a company like Ensono, whose rapid expansion, forward-thinking vision and global reach might feel like a dizzying ride to some.

"Listen," said VonDeylen. "We have to change, because we have to keep up with where our clients are going. We have to keep up with the changes in technology. But we also have to have respect for people and have empathy

for our organization, for what we're doing and how we're doing, and recognize it's a competitive marketplace."

At three years old, Ensono is just starting to figure out what kind of company it wants to be. In order to do that, it has to be able to intuit what the market wants, understand what its clients are asking for and internalize the concerns of its employees — all while growing by leaps and bounds. It's a tricky line to walk. Ensono has exactly the scale it needs right now, but VonDeylen says that's not going to last forever. The market, the technology, will keep changing and keep growing, and he will have to keep advocating for change as needed to stay relevant.

If he can just keep that culture of empathy alive, VonDeylen is confident Ensono can get the job done. —Kris Blackmon



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COMEBACK KID AWARD WINNER



MVP Network Consulting
Buffalo, New York
mvpworks.com

When MVP Network Consulting held its annual picnic for its 18 employees and their families on Sept. 10, 2011, it was to be a day of fun, food and friendship. But while playing a pick-up game of touch football with employees, co-CEO Jeremy Pollock, only 38 years old, had a massive heart attack and died in the Buffalo, New York, park where the event was being held.

For the then nine-year-old MSP and MSSP, it was a devastating blow.

A few days later, Ikram Massabini, Pollock's co-CEO, and the rest of his company's team began trying to regroup.

"We came back to the company and didn't know what to do," Massabini said. "We had to completely reinvent ourselves, from the products we were selling to the company's organization."

Pollock and Massabini, who had worked together in the past, bought MVP in August of 2002. Until his premature death, Pollock was a core part of the business, involved in nearly every stage of the product life cycle. He conducted R&D and wrote code, then helped test it and develop documentation for how to install and sell it. Pollock even delivered solutions to customers.

"Jeremy handled the back of the house," said Massabini. "I had no idea what was going on back there. He did just about everything and told us what to do with it. And then we went and sold it."

That meant Massabini had to relearn the business from top to bottom.

On the first work day after Pollock's

death, the first thing Massabini and his team members did was create a leadership team to help guide the now shell-shocked company.

"We came back and we selected a couple of our top techs and our top sales guy for the leadership team, which was tasked with running the company using committees and figuring out how to grow it moving forward," he said.

The team pulled together to continue Pollock's mission. They wanted to make him proud. But it has not been an easy road. Massabini said it took MVP six years after

Pollock's death to get back to where it wanted to be. The leadership team helped dramatically with the company's transition by adding structure, providing direction and helping determine how to best serve MVP's customers.

During those six years, MVP tripled in size to 51 employees, added its own 2,000-square-foot on-site data center to better serve its customers and moved into providing cloud services and consulting to follow emerging trends.

"Things were tenuous at times,"

said Massabini. "We were stuck a little bit." In fact, MVP held stagnant at \$2 million in revenue for a couple of years due to concerns from clients about the company's growth prospects after the tragedy.

To overcome this, Massabini and his team started a Virtual CIO program to provide responsive online support, started a marketing department and hit the streets to talk with their customers.

Today, things are much improved at MVP. "When something like this happens, it really brings a team together or it breaks it apart," said Massabini. "It took us some time to wrap it all together and get the growth that we found."

Revenue for the business to date in 2018 stands at about \$8.5 million and is expected to reach \$10 million by year's end. MVP's average customer has about 30 users, with its largest account at more than 1,000 users.

Receiving the 2018 Channel Futures MSP 501 Comeback Kid of the Year Award means a lot to the company.

"It's exciting, and it's well-deserved because our team truly shocked me by banding together so tightly following Jeremy's death," said Massabini. "We really thought after the first year that we were going to close down, that there was no way we could keep going."

Todd R. Weiss is editor-at-large for Channel Futures and Channel Partners.

 [linkedin.com/in/toddrweiss](https://www.linkedin.com/in/toddrweiss)

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Ikram Massabini

A man in a dark suit, white shirt, and dark tie is standing on a beach. He is holding a white smartphone in his right hand, taking a selfie. He is also holding a large white surfboard under his left arm. The background shows the ocean and a clear sky.

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NEWCOMER AWARD WINNER

TOLAR SYSTEMS, INC.

Tolar Systems
Abilene, Texas
tolarsystems.com

In 2012, Tolar Systems was a small break/fix, IT-project organization that barely cleared \$100,000 in revenue.

In 2014, the company decided a big change was needed and began transforming into a managed service provider. It paid off: Last year, Tolar's revenue and user base grew by more than 16 percent and 80 percent, respectively, and it's expecting in 2018 to double its growth and exceed the \$1 million revenue mark for the first time.

But that's not the only reason Tolar earns 2018 MSP 501 Newcomer Award, bestowed upon a first-time MSP 501er that is on an upward trajectory.

Founder Lance Tolar and Phillip Poarch, Tolar's director of operations, started with changing the company's perspective of what it was providing to clients. Instead of selling hours and one-off projects, Tolar today focuses on solutions and relationships. Those first conversations with existing clients were a mixed bag: Some jumped into the new model with enthusiasm. Others didn't buy in, and the MSP had to shed some customers.

Tolar started sourcing software and hardware itself and getting more involved in customer projects versus just the labor, Poarch explained.

Other changes involved establishing a standardized approach and becoming their clients' virtual CIO, expanding their discussions to include business

strategy, not just IT. Then Tolar began looking at its own offerings, partners and customers through a business development lens. As it evolved to become a service provider specializing in helping customers along their digital transformation journeys, it bolstered its service offering with assessments and bundled packages.

A milestone for Tolar was reaching the point in which 90 to 95 percent of its revenue was from managed services, and its managed services monthly revenue

covered all fixed and overhead expenses to the extent that every project, piece of software and hardware device is just profit that adds to the bottom line.

Many partners still need to transform to keep up with rapid changes in demand, new technologies and

industry trends. When starting that transformation, Poarch emphasizes that the most important thing is to determine your company's unique ability. Transforming the culture and getting buy-in up and down the ranks is a close second.

"There's also just building that belief system for a company that's trying to transform," he said. "If the leadership doesn't believe in what needs to

happen, and they're not willing to be that trailblazer for the company, then it's really hard to bring other people behind them."

Staff, especially old-timers used to doing things a certain way, can be reluctant to adopt new models. Many times, employees who come from a break/fix background think if a company bills enough hours, that's all that matters. But Poarch and Tolar are working to change that mindset into a proactive approach that identifies a customer problem 10 steps before it happens.

One of Tolar's best case studies highlights the City of Breckenridge, Texas, which was experiencing a lot of downtime with its computers due to frequent virus infections.

"I kept asking our old IT organization what the problem was, and they couldn't answer," said Heather Robertson-Caraway, city secretary. "We had no confidence in the IT services we were being provided at that time."

Since the city began working with Tolar, Robertson-Caraway says it hasn't experienced any viruses, has fewer IT issues and, when problems occur, is able to contact just one company to troubleshoot all of its systems.

"This saves us a significant amount of time and provides peace of mind that comes from knowing that the vendor managing our IT really understands our organization and is delivering a solution that works best for us."
—Edward Gately



Phillip Poarch



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DIGITAL INNOVATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD WINNER



TRIANZ

Trianz

Santa Clara, California

www.trianz.com

When Sri Manchala launched his MSP practice, Trianz, 17 years ago with just \$1,000, he drew on his background serving in India's armed forces to shape his approach to IT service delivery. Among the lessons Manchala brought from his military service: Delivering winning outcomes for clients on the first attempt was essential.

"There are no runners-up in war, and you can't fight the same battle twice," Manchala said. "You can't go back to the enemy and say, 'Hey, I learned a lot of lessons the last time I lost. Let's fight again.'"

Manchala learned the ropes of IT consulting during stints at KPMG and Cisco. He says both experiences set the stage for him to launch Trianz in 2001, with a goal of filling a void in the IT consulting space.

"I determined that we're going to start with the business point of view first, and then transition into how technology and IT can deliver these capabilities," he said.

Trianz has evolved from a boutique IT consulting firm providing basic managed services to a 1,600-employee MSP that leverages its own extensive IP and expertise to further clients' visions. Its innovation and forward-thinking development projects earned Trianz the 2018 MSP 501 Digital Innovator of the Year Award.

Lately, Trianz's clients have been

asking about next-gen business applications with automation capabilities that bolster staff and produce more predictable, lower-touch results. As applications become more advanced, Manchala expects to be pulled more and more into business conversations.

Trianz's MSP business is focused on hybrid-cloud-based IT services in four core areas, analytics, digital, infrastructure modernization and security, and Manchala touts its "Innovation Labs" testing facilities. But Trianz's real differentiator is the low-cost intellectual property it's developed to

support and accelerate each of those four areas. For example, its DataVision+ testing tool for data migration projects is designed to compare source and destination data, and Trianz says it's removed 40 percent of the effort associated with data migration.

Trianz also offers an aggregator platform that it says provides a complete view of a client's distributed infrastructure. To support its data analytics practice, the MSP developed the Trianz Marketing Data Lake Solution to provide an omnichannel

view of a client's customer base. Just like uptime and patching are table stakes today, so is analytics-as-a-service, which Manchala says makes Trianz focused on less technical, more insight- and action-oriented offerings.

The same is the case for cloud infrastructure, where Trianz has its own managed services platform for deploying, orchestrating, monitoring and managing multicloud services, called Concierto. "The client isn't even buying software anymore," Manchala says. "Either we buy the software, or we give them a platform and we manage it on that."

The concept of "digital transformation" has become so all-encompassing that it's almost impossible to pare down into something digestible and manageable, but through its IP development and process innovation, Trianz thinks it's making real headway, and its evolution is by no means done.

As Manchala learned all those years ago, no battle can be fought twice, so Trianz brings every bit of expertise and innovative IP it has to bear for clients. The company's slogan and the promise it makes to customers is "Digital Evolution Simplified" — and it's a promise Manchala is determined to keep.



Sri Manchala

Jeffrey Schwartz is editor-at-large for Channel Futures and Channel Partners.

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VANGUARD AWARD WINNER



INFINIT
CONSULTING

INFINIT Consulting
Campbell, California
infinitchconsulting.com

If you want to make your customers more digital, you need to look in the mirror first. So says CEO Darrin Swan of INFINIT Consulting, whose ongoing self-evolution distinguished it among its peers. The company placed 228th in the MSP 501 this year, and it's earned the 2018 Vanguard Award for thought leadership in digital transformation.

As its name suggests, INFINIT Consulting has come a long way. Jerod Powell founded the business in 2006 to advise clients through mergers and acquisitions, and the MSP made multiple pivots over the years. Swan, who joined INFINIT in 2016, tells us that the firm was working in large chunks, tackling million-dollar contracts at a time.

But the tech landscape changed when Microsoft made its hosted Exchange Server widely available as a service in 2008. The rise of Office 365 in 2011 helped standardize the "MSP model," according to Swan. It was during those years that INFINIT adopted managed services, including help desk and engineering.

The company transformed from consultant to recurring-revenue-earning managed service provider. It examines its customers' IT budgets, finds efficiencies and then gives them a single invoice.

"They don't have sales reps calling them all the time," Swan said. "We are their technology enabler."

But the evolution wasn't over.

The company coined itself a "cloud services provider," creating services for Microsoft Azure and adding offerings like unified communications and data protection. When Swan joined INFINIT, it was with the goal of building its digital transformation play. After its latest pivot, the organization self-styles as a digital transformation provider (DXP).

"We do the managed services. We do all the IT components, provide circuits through engineering, infrastructure, cloud structures and what have you," Swan said. "But now we're centralizing the data and then building solutions on top of it, helping the customer build their own intellectual property into their own unique set of capabilities that help make an impact in their business."

In an 18-month process, INFINIT first focuses on its clients' digital foundations by examining their IT budgets to see which tech assets are core to "keep the lights on." Ultimately, INFINIT works to better visualize the experience of the customer's employees and clients.

Digital transformation is a hot topic, and we asked Swan if customers feel

the same excitement that vendors and analysts are projecting. He says clients don't use phrases like "digital transformation." They talk in terms of business opportunities and challenges.

"Customers are conditioned to accept the way technology is or has been," he says. "You're operating in Excel, you're operating in Word, you're operating in PowerPoint and Outlook, and then you have legacy reporting systems that are very cumbersome."

Swan says his company's No. 1 use case may come as a surprise to some.

"We're transforming our own business," he said. "What that means is, we're changing the perspective of IT as a cost center to a business enabler that should be invested in. It takes things from the traditional business terms that executives understand, and we technically enable it."

"They need to begin transforming themselves," he said. "They need to look at the friction and the experience they create for their client and how can they make it easier, faster, more effective, more data driven. And then run a data-driven business."



Darrin Swan

James Anderson is news editor for Channel Futures and Channel Partners.



[linkedin.com/in/james-anderson-74894a5a](https://www.linkedin.com/in/james-anderson-74894a5a)



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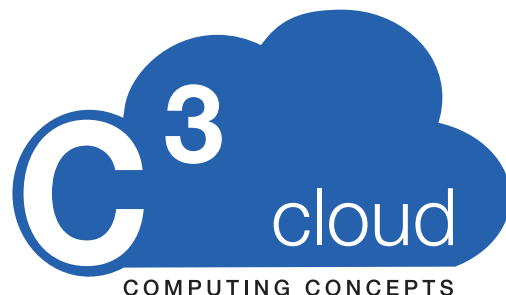


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STEAL THIS: 7 GREAT IDEAS FROM MSP 501 WINNERS

There are vanguards aplenty among you. Here are some of the ways they're advancing their businesses. Feel free to appropriate **By T.C. Doyle**



1. Develop Your Own IP

IBM Watson apps. Cybersecurity software. Digital transformation blueprints. These are just a few of the solutions that MSPs like yours have developed. Make no mistake: Home-grown intellectual property development has come to the channel. Developing IP is not something most partners set out to do. But scores have. Some

have developed vertical solutions. Others have invested in custom builds that connect business apps or manage networks more seamlessly. Take CrushBank, an offshoot of CHIPS Technology Group, a popular New York-based solution provider. CrushBank has developed a help desk tool that is powered by IBM Watson Technology. It enables “internal help desks, managed service providers and

enterprises/corporations to create a faster time to resolution, improve customer satisfaction, maintain control of your intellectual property and increase profitability by spending less time searching for answers, and more time finding solutions,” according to the company. Not bad for what was once a regional MSP.

2. Build Your Own Channel

In addition to developing their own IP, many of your peers are developing their own channels. That’s right: They are building robust initiatives to sell their ideas, innovations and services through partners like you. Take Netwise Resources, No. 194 on the 2018 MSP 501 list. The Indianapolis-based IT MSP provides support to businesses nationwide. It also provides mentoring to other members of its parent organization, Visual Edge Technologies, which oversees a number of office and IT technology companies. Or Red Key Solutions, No. 356 on the list. The White Plains, New York, company not only acquires smaller MSPs, it provides guidance and mentoring to those interested in its virtual CIO strategies. Then there’s INFINIT Consulting, which has developed a three-stage approach to digital transformation complete with a road map that includes steps for embracing agile development methodologies and IT governance. INFINIT’s Digital Transformation approach is packaged as a platform so that the company can help other MSPs and CSPs transform themselves into true “digital transformation providers.”

3. Develop Your Own Dashboard

All business owners think that they have their fingers on the metrics that

matter most to their companies. But how true is that? Think about your own organization. Do you or one of your colleagues have a handle on profitability by vendor, customer or employee? The answer is, “probably not.” This means you might be ignoring key metrics that determine success among MSPs, VARs and IT consultants.

Among top providers today, a few key metrics stand out. Think your Net Promoter score, EBITDA, monthly recurring revenue growth and multiple attach rate. That bucket also includes your ticket close rate, open rate and more. What about standards? If your attach rate is below 1.3, you’re underperforming. If your incident close rate is below 98 percent, you’re falling behind. And if your churn rate, a measure of the number of customers

In addition to developing their own IP, many of your peers are developing their own channels.

that don’t re-up with your company after 12 months of service, is about 5 percent, you’re in trouble. To run your business, you need a custom dashboard. Limit it to the metrics that matter most to you. Your sales pipeline. Your support ticket close rates. Your bench utilization and customer satisfaction. Whatever the combination, make it yours. That’s what i.t.NOW has done. The Salt Lake City managed services provider has developed its own tools and methodologies that automate routine IT tasks. This includes tools for patches, updates, backups and more. Thanks to the effort, i.t.NOW has the ability to zero in on the key metrics and indicators that are defining the world of cloud computing.

4. Say Something That Resonates

Did you know that when you Google the words “virtual CIO,” more than 15 million responses come back? It’s true. Managed services? That search returns more 378 million listings. Network optimization? It returns 161 million responses. Try it for yourself. The point is simple: Standing out in the VAR and MSP channel takes some advanced thinking and ingenuity. To stand out in his U.K. market, IT Lab CEO Peter Sweetbaum penned a white paper that outlined his thought leadership and market differentiation. In “The Adaptive Technology Model,” Sweetbaum identifies the benefits of using an interchangeable portfolio

of web-delivered apps and services. In particular, he outlines how the technological shift toward an app- and SaaS-centric service model changes the way IT services are sold, managed and maximized. Then there’s Bob Coppedge, owner and CEO of Simplex-IT of Stow, Ohio. An industry veteran, Coppedge penned a book, “A CEO’s Survival Guide to Information Technology,” that captures his ethos. Coppedge says the book was inspired by the frustration he experienced when talking about the challenges and problems that business owners have with IT.

“We IT folks have a reputation of being condescendingly arrogant, overbearing, and aloof,” he writes. If

you're a would-be customer, that kind of thought leadership resonates. It also conjures up new sales.

5. Grind It Out

What's the key to profitability? New customers? Sales of emerging technologies? Recurring revenue? While all of these contribute to improved business results, there's another side to the story. It's called "operational efficiency," and it's not something everyone does well. One reason? The rapidly changing competitive landscape. In a recent study produced by trade association CompTIA, researchers found that nearly half of channel companies believe operating a channel business now is more complex than just two years ago. Key reasons are expansions into new business lines and models, the introduction of emerging technologies into their portfolios and new demands from customers, according to CompTIA.

No wonder only 20 percent of surveyed firms consider their operations to be "very efficient."

To combat this, "grinding it out" has become a passion of some. Take Beyond Computer Solutions. Almost every client that signed on with the Atlanta-area company is still with it today. Through the years, Beyond has provided a superior level of service through the eras of break/fix, managed services, hosted Exchange and cloud. By constantly refining its processes, it continuously exceeds customer expectations.

6. Embrace Something New

One measure of a healthy company is the percent of revenue that it generates from new business initiatives. In general, roughly 20-30

percent of revenue should come from activities that are less than 36 months old. This is especially true today, when product life cycles are shorter and waves of disruptive innovation come from out of the blue. If you think you might be falling behind, make like MSPs that add something new to their businesses in order to stay current.

Take Computer Resources of America. The New York-based company has been in business for more than 25 years. From humble beginnings in printer repair, it has grown into a highly respected MSP, cloud services broker and technology consultant. In 2017, it was recognized by Microsoft as the Azure Partner of the Year. Today, the company is advising clients on everything from blockchain to artificial intelligence. And it's making inroads into health care, real estate

Change is as natural as it is inevitable.

and other vertical markets. Throughout its tenure, Computer Resources of America has managed to stay hungry, keep moving and try new things.

Not every new thing succeeds, of course. Writing for the Harvard Business Review, Innosight thought leaders Scott Anthony, David S. Duncan and Pontus M.A. Siren conclude the following: "A new growth effort might, for instance, involve targeting a new customer set, working on an unproven technology, interacting with new partners, and trying out a new revenue model. If the probability that each of those four areas work out as planned is, individually, 80 percent, the overall chances of success are just 40

percent." While that might sound like a good reason to sit still, it isn't. Change is as natural as it is inevitable.

7. Love the Family

A lot of organizations boast that they treat their workers "like family." Some really mean it. Take 360IT Partners of Virginia Beach, Virginia. Company founder Martin Joseph was so grateful to several of his employees that he gifted a percent of ownership in the company to them. As a result, his core team has stuck together and helped to build the company into one of the most successful MSPs in the area. Then there's Intrust IT. The company's employees not only work together, they vacation together. The Cincinnati IT support provider has a company-owned lake house where employees and their families get away and spend some downtime. If that sounds a tad too close for comfort for you, then note the results that close cohesion produces. Take customer service. Intrust IT is so proud of its record of customer service that it posts its satisfaction score on its website on a monthly basis.

The trust and confidence that company owners have in their staff also enable Intrust IT to offer a \$1 million guarantee "that no ransomware attack will go undetected and cause irreparable damage." You cannot take that kind of risk if your payroll is chock full of 9-5 workers. But you can when your employees treat the company, and its customers, like family.

T.C. Doyle is senior director of content, Channel Futures & Channel Partners.

 [linkedin.com/in/tcdoyl](https://www.linkedin.com/in/tcdoyl)

 [@tcdutah](https://twitter.com/tcdutah)

WHERE'S THE MARGIN? SECURITY SERVICES

By Jeffrey Schwartz

The buzz about digitization and cloud migration over the past few years might suggest that's where enterprises are spending all their IT dollars. Not so: 73 percent of 2018 MSP 501 listees rated security as their fastest growing service, with 71 percent zeroing in on network security. From there, it drops off markedly, with 55 percent choosing professional services, 52 percent selecting Office 365 and 51 percent pointing to consulting.

It's hardly a surprise that security is a major area of investment, given the unrelenting pace of attacks. The dilemma for partners isn't *whether* to invest in security-as-a-service, but how to architect a service, bundle the various tools required to cover customer needs, then select a platform and handle the business end.

Oh, and don't forget staffing.

Security's one of four core components of Liberty Technology's (MSP 501 #242) portfolio, along with compute, connectivity and collaboration. Liberty Tech, which primarily serves midsize organizations, uses Cisco for security information and event management

(SIEM), and there's a lot to wrangle: Many of Liberty's clients have around 50 different security tools, from multiple vendors, with little integration. Despite the plethora of tools, Ben Johnson, founder and CEO of the Griffin, Georgia-based MSP, says there's a 66 percent chance an organization will be breached. "Not just once," Johnson warned, "but five times. Spending all of that money is not effective."

Johnson recommends moving clients to a common security architecture. "All of those pieces fit together and work as one in an orchestrated fashion," he said.

Customers are warming to the idea.

Logicalis (MSP 501 #10) offers what it calls an architectural approach to security with services such as threat assessment, securing servers by ensuring DNS isn't enabled, offering secure mobility solutions and implementation of multifactor authentication. "We pick our swim lanes, we pick our areas that are most relevant to our skills, to our customers, and we make sure we have the disciplines and domain expertise to deliver against that," said Mike Houghton, Logicalis' chief sales officer.

Robert Moyer, president of Rochester,

New York-based ComTec Solutions (MSP 501 #248) just hired a cybersecurity engineer with extensive experience working on Department of Defense projects. He's seeing managed security as a key area of growth. "We're starting to add to our tool set and decide if we are going to actually bring up an MSSP or are we going to outsource a SOC service," said Moyer.

Valiant Technology (MSP 501 #206) is also exploring its options for delivering a bundled managed security service. Tom Clancy, Valiant's CEO, says providing a bundle of offerings from different vendors that work well together is the most effective way for an MSP to retain its role as a trusted adviser.

"If you go to your customers and just say, 'Hey, buy AlienVault from me,' a savvy customer will go to AlienVault.com and see how much it costs to buy it direct and ask, 'Do I really need you to run this thing that is cloud-based and runs itself?'" Clancy said. "The clever MSPs are making a security package. They're bundling it all together and making it as a tack on" to other business services.

Clancy said he will offer the security service in a way few can refuse. "Our plan is to have our security bundle as not optional," he said. "Our managed services plans will say, 'It costs this much per seat, and it's this much if you want the security package. And by the way, you really want the security package, otherwise here's my limitation of liability.'" And that could cost more in the long run.

Photo Credit: Michael N. Meyer



'Clever MSPs are making a security package. They're bundling it all together and making it a tack-on.'

— Tom Clancy

CHERYL COOK: CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

After 25 years in the channel and IT trenches, Dell EMC's Cheryl Cook has learned a thing or two about building new alliances and thriving in a tumultuous business reality. It's all about taking chances. **BY LYNN HABER**

History was in the making in early October 2015. Dell had announced its plan to acquire EMC. Pundits and financial analysts endlessly dissected the then-record-breaking \$67 billion deal while industry talking heads tossed around adjectives like “ambitious” and “risky.”

But for the channel chiefs involved, Dell's Cheryl Cook and EMC's Gregg Ambulous, this was personal.

Who would ultimately head up the Dell EMC channel organization? That remained a mystery for eight months. Finally, in July 2016, Marius Hass, then the newly appointed president and chief commerce officer of Dell EMC, penned an open letter to channel partners saying John Byrne was the man for the job.

“I was very optimistic about what the merger might bring, but personally, our roles changed,” Cook recently told Channel Partners, reflecting on that time. “John Byrne came in to run sales. Did it feel great? Maybe not.”

Unexpected twists and turns are inevitable in any long executive career, especially in IT. Today, Cook heads up Dell EMC's global channel marketing group, an organization she helped build. We asked Cook what lesson she took away from that transition: “Take a chance, be flexible and take the challenge — go for it,” she said. “I embraced the opportunity to contribute, give back and make a difference. I'm still very influential in strategy, and I'm loving marketing.”

That message is particularly relevant for women in tech, who routinely undersell their abilities compared with male peers. It's no surprise that the oft-quoted statistic that men apply for a job when they meet only 60 percent of qualifications whereas women apply only if they meet 100 percent of them comes from a Hewlett Packard internal report.

Cook's seen some major changes in the tech landscape. Prior to Dell EMC, she spent 12 years at Sun Microsystems during the “dot-com to the dot-bomb” tumult.

“Those were challenging business circumstances, and to be fair, there weren't many managers who had a recipe book or playbook to navigate through some of that,” she said. “I was bringing recommendations to management, such as let's change contracts, let's change where we were going at the time. You had Cisco writing off a lot of inventory because the market just crashed, but Sun didn't do that.”

Instead, Sun had to get creative.

“I'd say there was self-doubt for sure in some of the recommendations because nobody knew what was going to work,” Cook said.

Clearly, more of her ideas worked than not, because by the end of her tenure at Sun in 2010, Cook was senior vice president of global accounts and industries. “Professionally that was one of the more challenging times, and it wasn't always pleasant, but in the end, I probably took away the most learning from that experience,” she said.

STEM Drive

The oldest of three daughters, Cook had a champion early on in life — her father, a NASA engineer and scientist who worked on all of the Apollo missions. It didn't hurt that Cook is admittedly competitive and had a knack for math and science. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in computer science, one of the few women in her class in the early 1980s.

Cook says she escaped many of the negative experiences that women in male-dominated fields still experience. In fact,



she said she was fortunate to have some “pretty fair” bosses who put her in results-oriented positions and judged based on outcomes. “Results matter,” she said.

Indeed. It also helps to be a collaborator and a communicator who’s willing to advocate for yourself and your staff.

“You have to be able to stand up for yourself — not in a confrontational or adversarial way, but in a confident way,” Cook said. “It was always about the team.”

For a number of years, Cook’s been using those talents to advance women in technology and the next generation of workers. She’s a leader in the Dell Women in Action group and a new Dell EMC Women’s Partner Network and an active member of the Dell Women’s Entrepreneurial Network, which is spearheaded by Karen Quintos, executive vice president and chief customer officer at Dell. Cook speaks both to groups within the company and externally, pulling together women as she travels the globe for work, which is about 60 percent of the time.

“There’s networking, mentoring and career coaching — helping

younger girls, career women, as well as people early in their career,” she said. “I’m motivated by making sure that you’re giving back as much as you’re getting.”

When it comes to young women and STEM, there’s work to do to make a technology career more relevant as opposed to, say, medicine. That means doing a better job educating young women about how technology drives business outcomes, particularly in vertical industries, where they can identify real-world positive outcomes for people.

There are articles galore about the dearth of women candidates for IT jobs, and an equal number about the inability to retain female talent. Cook sees that reality: Finding female candidates is difficult. Senior women must be active in advocating for the channel, and the tech sector as a whole.

“I think we have a shared responsibility — along with all my male colleagues — to do our very best to hold ourselves accountable to get good, inclusive, diverse candidate lists so that we’re giving people opportunities to step into these roles,” she said.

Firms need to challenge their talent acquisition teams, revisit internal referrals and, when looking at external candidates, make sure that those lists are broad and representative to help open up and create new opportunities.

Leading in this time of monumental change in the tech sector can be both stimulating and exhausting — and there’s no sign we’re slowing down, given digital transformation. “The pace is like nothing we’ve seen before,” Cook said. “It can be invigorating, stimulating and overwhelming. I tell my colleagues to stay focused on their priorities, helping their team, the customers and partners.”

Leaders at channel organizations should think about doing the same. But remember, you need enough fuel in the engine to address the dizzying pace of change in the industry — and that’s all about work/life balance. Give yourself permission to be flexible; to Cook, that means taking the time for important events and being willing to work longer hours on another day.

“My motto is, I can live with guilt but not regret,” Cook said. You can’t be everywhere all the time, but you also don’t want to miss life’s important moments.

“Make judgment calls, and the rest will fall in line.”

Lynn Haber is content director, IT channel, for Channel Futures and Channel Partners.

 [linkedin.com/in/lynnhaber](https://www.linkedin.com/in/lynnhaber)

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5 OPEN-SOURCE TRENDS TO WATCH

From blockchain to SMBs, there are plenty of reasons partners should embrace OSS well beyond Linux **By Todd R. Weiss**

Open-source software use in business has come a long way since the first LinuxWorld Conference & Expo was held in San Jose, California, in March 1999. Linux had been around as an operating system since 1991, but its use in business computing was just beginning to germinate by the early 2000s.

Fast-forward to 2018. Open-source software powers the internet, much of the world's cloud computing infrastructure, thousands of companies around the globe and a wide range of technologies. Channel partners are increasingly selling services, offering advice and helping clients use open source effectively.

And despite that phenomenal growth, millions of developers continue to devote countless hours to projects. By the end of 2017, more than 24 million developers in more than 200 countries had contributed to some 67 million GitHub project repositories. Many more projects reside on repositories offered by GitLab, Bitbucket, SourceForge and others.

For almost every customer software need, there is an open-source project working on the problem.

With all of this activity around the world, some open-source trends could become even more important to partners in the future.

Blockchain Is Emerging

Heather Kirksey, vice president of community and ecosystem development at The Linux Foundation, says finance and banking firms are eyeing open source. The Hyperledger blockchain project, which The Linux Foundation sponsors, is taking off, said Kirksey, as a way to tackle such challenging problems as security and authentication for a wide range of industries.

Blockchains, which are distributed databases with no central authority or points of trust, can streamline business processes to save time and money while reducing risk, making the tech attractive to a variety of customers. Emerging trends that employ blockchain and Hyperledger include enabling transactions, supply chain verifications and identity validations, as well as for improving security and privacy, said Kirksey. All of these are opportunities for channel partners to grow their services and sales.

Networking and Cloud

In other industries, open-source projects such as OpenStack and Kubernetes are advancing network transformations.

"They are really looking to rearchitect their networks to be more software-based," said Kirksey. "We're seeing a lot more convergence along verticals."

And as that continues, more networking trailblazers are contributing code to these core projects. After all, that involves their own developers in the projects they need for their own infrastructures. A win-win. Channel partners with dev chops have similar opportunities.

When it comes to container and Kubernetes trends, Kirksey sees their growth as a continuing evolution of companies' move to the cloud.

"We're seeing projects beginning to go up the stack, from Linux to OpenStack or Kubernetes in the cloud, to virtualization and to projects such as automotive-grade Linux," she said.

Kirksey also sees more efforts by open-source projects to gather input from the end users of their work.

"We're seeing this trend with telecom operators and also in the form of end-user advisory groups," she said. "We're now getting those comments fed straight to the developer community."

It makes sense: "As certain open-source projects become more strategic to their businesses, they want to have more comments and insights," she said.

Functions-as-a-Service

Dana Gardner, principal analyst with Interarbor Solutions, told us the open-source trend he sees as most important

today involves serverless computing, which includes functions-as-a-service (FaaS). The open-source project working on this technology, OpenFaaS, is a cloud-agnostic way to write code to one standard without having to worry about the underlying virtual servers or cloud providers, said Gardner.

“It gives you an upgrade path, despite being completely decoupled from any particular cloud provider’s platform,” he said. FaaS “has captured the interest of developers and operators, in enterprises big and small.” A major benefit of the project, like so many open-source efforts, is that it is aimed at keeping lock-in potential low and reinforcing the ability to leverage new technology with low risk and low cost.

“With OpenFaaS, you are baking functions into Docker containers, so you can run those as standard microservices outside of the OpenFaaS platforms,” he said. “This is not necessarily serverless. You still have to manage the underlying servers. But it does allow you to take advantage of your existing Kubernetes, Nomad or Docker Swarm Clusters.”

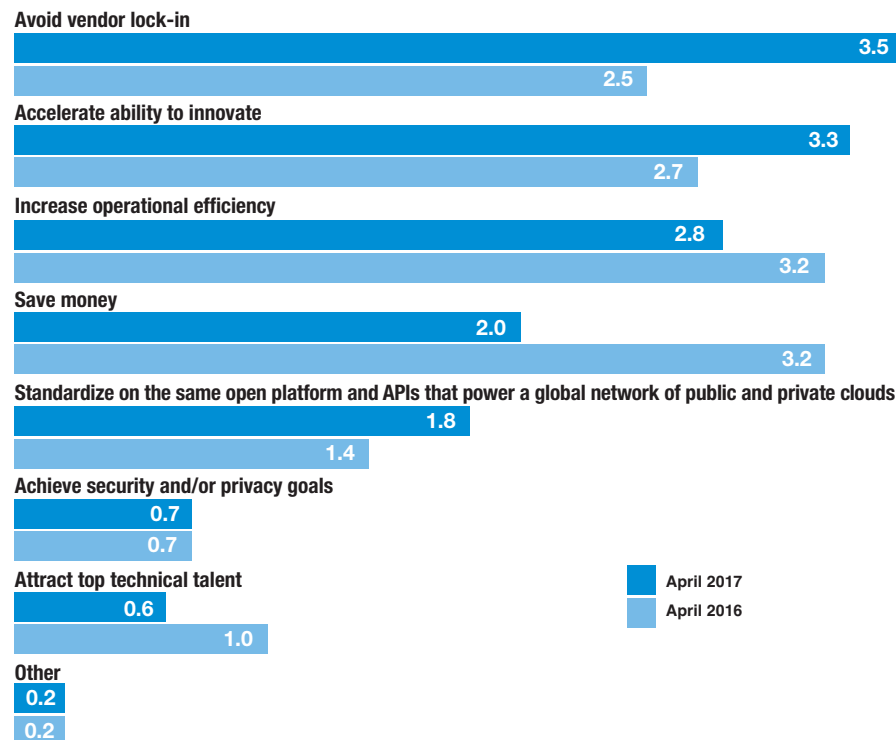
For the channel, this could be a growing market for bringing newfangled services to customers who are seeking new ideas for IT service delivery.

Market Stabilization Is Here

Gartner analyst Thomas Murphy sees the stabilization of the open-source marketplace as critical to open source becoming “either the foundation or complete solution” for companies. Stability is also key for getting partners to invest in skills and solutions.

According to Gartner, open source is so pervasive today that it is being used in mission-critical workloads by more than 90 percent of IT organizations

Why Do Organizations Choose OpenStack?



Source: OpenStack.org

worldwide. That provides potential opportunities for channel partners around the world.

“Open source has been around a long time, and it is woven into every piece of software we have used for years,” said Murphy. “Because developers drive the market, because it creates the best potential for innovation, because software patent law is a mess, because corporations want the best efficiency, it was almost inevitable” for this shift to occur.

SMBs Adopting OSS

Analyst Tirena Dingeldein of Capterra, which focuses on small businesses, said she sees open-source software being used by the channel to help solve the IT problems of customers of all sizes.

“Open-source options are often free, to encourage the collaborative element

that naturally increases the functionality of the software,” said Dingeldein. “With the right technical knowledge on an SMB team, they can get an almost custom-made software solution for whatever issue they’re facing.”

Those capabilities and strengths that larger enterprises see in open-source software are just as important to smaller businesses and to the channel partners who work with them.

“Today’s worker wants to collaborate easily, and open-source software allows them to create a solution that directly solves their team’s problems,” she said. “Also, the growing number of SMBs facing budget obstacles leads to the adoption, and subsequent adaptation, of open-source software. SMBs are using flexible open-source tools to fill in service holes that they otherwise can’t afford to solve.”



3 Survival Tips for the Everything-as-a-Service Age

By Mariah West

Bain & Company expects SaaS subscriptions to grow 18 percent by 2020, and since SaaS handily beats IaaS and PaaS for cloud spend, that's a significant number. Gartner predicts the IaaS market will reach \$72.4 billion in sales worldwide by 2020. And Goldman Sachs just released a survey of CIOs that indicates 18 percent of workloads are now running in the public cloud; that number should increase to 34 percent in three years. Given this momentum, many partners find themselves at a fork in the road. Do they transition their businesses to encompass a CSP model, or do they partner with or acquire a CSP?

Fortunately, the choices aren't quite so extreme.

The skills that made you successful should enable you to stay competitive. Cloud is complex. Confusion around lock-in, data governance, unplanned downtime, privacy and security, plus a plethora of provider choices, will keep partner expertise in demand. Last year, RightScale's State of the Cloud Survey reported that a business using the cloud will buy from at least six different vendors and run a blend of private and public clouds. The future is likely multicloud, and you have customers in desperate need of direction.

Partners are by nature customer-first consultants who build technology solutions to support and enable business operations. While you might

deliver a SaaS-based product or a cloud service, this doesn't make you a cloud service provider. CSPs generally have data centers that host, run or replicate data and applications. Probably the most pronounced difference between a typical partner and a CSP is that one is in the business of hosting applications, maintaining servers and storage, and provisioning out services to clients.

The other is not. And that's OK.

Customers are asking how to get to cloud. Equip yourself to answer their questions. How?

1. Add value where there's concern.

Security, compliance, business continuity and uptime are examples of cloud concerns that you can ease by offering leadership and expertise on multiple cloud platforms. When partnering with CSPs that offer specialized services, carefully evaluate the stability of their offerings, the flexibility of their contracts, the locations of their data centers and their reseller programs. Check to see if it's possible to white label offerings; that might also include the ability to build a custom portal for the customer under your brand. For customers who are used to managing their own infrastructures, this can make a huge difference in their cloud comfort level.

2. If you're agile, managed and public cloud is not the enemy.

Customers can pull out a corporate card and try new technologies without ever consulting you. Get over it. Many times I've heard partners cite this or that cloud provider

as a competitor. With that mindset, you're out of luck when customers dip their toes in cloud and you have neither insights nor competitive options. Agile partners help their customers experiment with cloud. An adviser who knows the pros and cons of a major public cloud service versus a regional managed cloud provider can protect a customer from over- or under-committing.

3. Embrace the subscription license.

Finally, what might be the most challenging area is changing the way you sell and manage accounts. Partners with VAR backgrounds often focus on one-time sales. They operate like hunters who bag their big game then return home until the next hunt. But selling in the CSP space is more like farming. You must learn to work with short- and long-term subscription licenses, where crops yield financial rewards throughout the term.

The subscription license approach requires sales reps to communicate a different value proposition to customers who may be looking to transition from a capex to an opex model. By keeping these three steps in mind, you can grab a sizeable piece of the CSP market without restructuring.

Mariah West is director of global partner marketing at Zerto.

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MILLENNIALS: TALKIN' 'BOUT Y GENERATION



Aaron Leveston



Bryan Reynolds



Sunandini Verma



Dante White

By James Anderson

The millennial generation is a hot topic in business circles, and our newly formed Channel NX2Z aims to bridge the gap between baby boomers, Gen Xers and their younger counterparts through cross-mentorship, education and recruitment. The group will host its Workforce of the Future Symposium Wednesday, Oct. 10, at Channel Partners Evolution. A panel of industry leaders — including Hilary Gadda of TPx Communications, Jason Bystrak of eFolder and Tiffani Bova of Salesforce — will dish out career advice for people of all ages. In anticipation of the event, we reached out to millennials from the recently assembled Channel NX2Z board of directors for insights.

Sunandini Verma: Founder of Amrev Media, a Canadian firm that offers app development, marketing consulting and web design.

Dante White: Senior channel manager with UC provider RingCentral.

Bryan Reynolds: Director of post sales for Chicago-based master agent TBI.

Aaron Leveston: National account

manager with RingCentral and the co-founder of Channel NX2Z.

Channel Partners: *Every generation has its stereotypes. Do you have a horror story of people making assumptions about you?*

SUNANDNI VERMA: This happens to me all the time. I've had people ask me my age before giving me a project. Luckily, I always turn it around with technology and marketing strategies from new and innovative perspectives, but the reality is, it's unfair to even ask my age. I've heard "no" many times because of my age. A part of why I started my own business was so I didn't have to prove myself or break through the resistance of people older than me.

BRYAN REYNOLDS: I was presenting in front of a C-level executive at a provider, and before I could start, they stated how young I was to the entire room and made several side comments about my experience. I believe it was all in good fun, but the rest of the presentation was then not taken seriously. I've since been able to control a meeting/presentation, but it was a good learning opportunity.

We've seen various statistics about the channel "aging out." Do you feel that the industry is getting younger?

AARON LEVESTON: Yes, I do see the industry getting younger. However, by comparison it doesn't seem to be happening as fast as the rest of the tech industry at large. I believe this has much more to do with the lack of overall recruitment and engagement by the channel with the younger generations. It seems the recurring theme is that most younger workers' channel involvement came by way of accident.

REYNOLDS: I absolutely have seen the industry getting younger. The channel that we play in is centered exclusively on technology, and technology is advancing at a faster rate than ever before. The generation that is coming into the channel is more adept at adopting and embracing newer technology. Because of this, they're able to identify with the industry a bit more closely and organically grow within it. That's not to say there isn't space for those who have a lot of experience, but the younger generation will most certainly overtake the channel very soon, both as sellers

and consumers.

VERMA: I don't think that's entirely true. I think every industry ages out because there are pioneers in each that people strive to be like, and they start young to reach their goals. However, technology is an interesting space because we have younger entrepreneurs and pioneers than any other industry.

DANTE WHITE: I see that sales organizations are getting younger. However, the channel still remains on the older end of the spectrum. Typically to become a channel manager you must have advanced sales and management experience. This presents a problem since most channel organizations are out of touch with how people are incentivized and learn nowadays.

What do channel companies need to do to become attractive to the next generation?

WHITE: Education is key here. I think many younger professionals are unaware of the channel. Setting up a solid career path for new hires would be a great way. It's not that channel isn't attractive; I think it's the best-kept secret in professional careers.

REYNOLDS: To attract consumers: embrace change. Understand who your customer is and who your customer is going to be. A lot of revenue is going to be produced by the upcoming generation, and if companies don't realize that, then they might as well close their doors. They need to not only stay on the edge when it comes to technology, but also the techniques they use to attract and retain the next generation. They tend to think and make buy decisions differently. Don't take that as a hindrance; take it as an opportunity.

To attract employees: Understand that

the stereotypes of future generations are just that. People tend to shy away from things they don't understand. Embrace it. There are some very valuable minds in the coming generation, capitalize on it. The "9 to 5" mentality doesn't necessarily appeal to the next generation of employees. Instead, they value experience and contributions, and they value making a positive change above all. If your company is rigidly structured in a way that doesn't promote this, you will surely lose out.

VERMA: I feel there is a gap in helping each other advance in their careers. As a business owner in the industry, I feel it would be beneficial to find a way to generate leads and build genuine relationships to help each other. I find there is very little interest or true follow-up at events because there is no initiative to help each other.

What stands out to you as areas where vendors, partners, master agents and so forth can grow?

LEVESTON: Being in technology, it is naturally assumed that innovation is our DNA. When it comes to the technology we sell, market and create, that is true. However, many of the techniques are antiquated when it comes to how teams are managed, HR functions and education.

REYNOLDS: Make an attempt to understand the next generation, but don't treat them as science projects. Connections matter; make them. If you are treating your next generation of customers as acquisitions, you won't keep them.

Is there a slogan or a philosophy that you follow in your business career?

VERMA: Esther Hicks said, "The most valuable skill or talent that you could ever develop is that of directing your thoughts toward what you want."

REYNOLDS: "Peaks and Valleys."

You may not always be taken seriously, make the best decisions or have a good day, but the most important part of it is learning from every experience and applying that knowledge to the future. It's a simple concept, but effective. It has gotten me through a lot of down times. There's always a peak after a valley.

WHITE: Stay true. At the end of the day I have to look at myself in the mirror and feel comfortable with who I am, what I do and how I do it. I remind myself every day to not compromise my morals or convictions. I'm in this for the long run, and my name or "brand" is important to me.

What advice do you have for young people as they try to advance their careers?

LEVESTON: "Twelve months to show me, 18 months to make it happen." This is the stance I take as it pertains to my career. I've approached every opportunity as a steppingstone and have always been open with my managers about my desire to progress. Twelve months to show me that there is upward mobility and 18 months to give me an opportunity to get in that position. Since I know some will read this with a "millennial bias," this rule can only be applied if you are a top performer!

REYNOLDS: Listen. We often want our own ideas put out there quickly in order to get ourselves noticed, but that's not always the best practice. Your peers and managers value (just as you do with your peers and managers) someone who listens before they act.



The Doyle Report: The Downside of Incremental Improvements

By T.C. Doyle

Leak-proof gaskets. Enhanced Recovery After Surgery (ERAS) medical protocols. The Gillette Fusion5 Razor. All the above are wonderful examples of sustaining or incremental improvements to existing innovations. Each made a big impact in their field.

But the Skype for Business Build 16.19.132? Eh, not so much. While it added the ability to display “a delegator’s name on the incoming call notification shown to delegates,” it’s not likely to be remembered as a great piece of technology. Nor should it.

Once heralded as a technological marvel, incrementally better software improvements have become a burden. They take over our machines at all the wrong times and leave us confused when they include cosmetic changes after the fact.

To their credit, Microsoft and other software companies realize they need to change. “Have you ever had to stop what you were doing, or wait for your computer to boot up because the device updated at the wrong time?” wonders Microsoft’s Windows Insider chief Dona Sarkar in a recent corporate blog. “We heard you, and to alleviate this pain, if you have an update pending we’ve updated our reboot logic to use a new system that is more adaptive and proactive.”

Let’s hope the effort isn’t too little, too late. As it stands today, millions of corporate end users, including some of your own customers, are saying “no” to software updates to avoid work interruptions and compatibility conflicts. It’s the functional equivalent of hitting the “snooze button” on your computer or mobile device.

That’s a bad thing when you consider the possible downsides of not upgrading

your software. Consider what Google found out three years ago when it interviewed more than 230 security experts. Google asked its panel to share their top recommendations for staying safe online. Their consensus No. 1 piece of advice: Keep your software, as well as that of your customers, up-to-date.

Yet users now routinely ignore updates. Frequency is one reason, quality is another. Take the aforementioned Skype for Business. Once a simple, straightforward

2013 Malibu. ... If saving money is more important than extra horsepower or having the latest in-car tech, we’d suggest giving a [Certified Pre-Owned] Malibu a close look before paying a premium for the redesigned model.”

You have to wonder if GM would have bothered to spend the \$1 billion redesigning the car platform if they could have read the reviews in advance. Maybe they should have performed a pre-mortem before introducing the car.

Millions of corporate customers are saying “no” to software updates to avoid work interruptions and compatibility conflicts.

product, the user interface is now clumsy. Each new chat creates a new thread. This means that every conversation you have with Kevin down the hall is treated as a new discussion. Good luck trying to find the one in which he advised how to properly file your expense report.

IT, of course, isn’t the only industry in which the word “upgrade” or “new and improved” doesn’t necessarily translate into “better.” Take the redesigned 2013 Chevrolet Malibu. When it debuted in late 2012, it was decried as the worst redesign in years. In its review Autotrader posed the following question: “... is it worth what turns out to be a substantial price premium over certified-used versions of the previous Malibu?”

Ultimately, the editors concluded not so much.

“For most people, that’s not a compelling enough argument to spend thousands of dollars extra for the new

Experts in a variety of fields are awakening to the downsides of incremental improvements. Take some of the researchers at Intermountain Healthcare in Salt Lake City. After years of study, they have come to recognize that the best thing we could do to improve patient outcomes would

be to refocus the energy we spend looking for the next great advance and instead direct it to applying what we already know in a consistent and high-quality manner.

If that sounds crazy, please note that the organization was once featured on the cover of The New York Times Magazine as the outfit that was doing more to fix health care than anyone. Don’t get me wrong: They are absolutely for medical research. As researchers and scientists, however, they have become keenly aware that the number of drugs, procedures and devices introduced each year contributes to bad outcomes and spiraling costs if not properly integrated with proven care protocols.

Something to think about while you’re waiting for your device to reboot for the umpteenth time.

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