

Accelerating Growth Through Partnership



Quick Look

Company: SharpCloud

Industry: Social Software and Collaboration

Founded: 2012

Founders: Sarim Khan and Rusty Johnson

Headquarters: London, England

Website: sharpcloud.com



This technology story is so familiar that it's almost cliché: Two friends meet in a suburban garage, dream up a transformative idea, and nurture it into reality. Sarim Khan and Rusty Johnson's story follows this plot line, except in their case there wasn't a garage.



“Enterprise feels very comfortable about data security with Microsoft.”

– Sarim Khan

Why Microsoft?

Microsoft partners offer deep market, product, and customer expertise – allowing companies to focus on what they do best.

Microsoft Partner Network has the customer and regulatory knowledge to help develop and position products within their markets.

Meeting on their first day at England’s Lancaster University, Khan and Johnson would reconnect 10 years later to create their first company – Pertmaster, a company specializing in predictive risk and analytics software. Eventually it would be sold to Primavera Systems (now Oracle Project Risk Analysis). In building Pertmaster, they realized that there was a lot of space to improve business tools and a need among enterprises to bring data, content, and feedback to better tell deeply engaging, data-driven stories.

“We knew from our last business that [customers] didn’t have a compelling way to have strategic discussions and quite often their meetings would become a frustrating round of static slide decks based on some numbers from spreadsheets, we saw that this process didn’t engage the audience and in some cases led to executive disputes.”

– Sarim Khan

They had a transformational vision: to develop a new and engaging way for business people to create visually appealing, data-driven stories that support constructive collaboration and conversations. In effect, creating a virtual place for business. This realization inspired their second venture, SharpCloud – a data-driven, visually-rich tool to enable non-linear discussions supported by the small data that matters.

With its ability to manage users via Active Directory, aggregate Microsoft Office documents, SharePoint content, video, SAP, and Microsoft Dynamics, and present this data in a highly-visual and flexible way, SharpCloud enables cross-team and organizational collaboration. Enterprise customers can



better share information, have well-timed conversations, and make strategic decisions based on relevant data.

The value of Partner-to-Partner networking

As early customers began to use SharpCloud, Khan realized that his team needed to find a strategic partner who could take their product to a wider market and allow his team to do what they do best: develop software.

SharpCloud's customers sought advice on how to deploy and deeply integrate the software within their own systems and Azure to tell focused, impactful stories. As an ISV, SharpCloud knew they needed to fill these gaps, but the cost and time to develop this expertise in-house created additional challenges.

At the 2014 CeBIT conference, Khan met Ralph Oldenburg of T-Systems Multimedia Solutions, and soon after, a partnership was struck. As a Gold Certified Microsoft Partner, T-Systems Multimedia Solutions had the technical expertise and licensing credentials to host SharpCloud on Microsoft Azure.

Even better, they were already using SharpCloud. "What we like about T-Systems was they didn't just look at us as a partner, they initially looked at SharpCloud as a tool that they would use to better engage their own customers. Before they were a partner, they were a customer. We'd known for about a year that we needed to get some strategic partners onboarded who could take the message out (to the market), and also we wanted to test the message with partners because partners aren't shy in telling you if an idea's not going to fly," said Khan.

The value of a good partner

A relationship with a Microsoft Partner can bring much more to the table than just implementation. In this case, T-Systems Multimedia Solutions offered SharpCloud with training and integration, as well as development consultation. This drove deeper customer engagement and allowed SharpCloud to focus on what they do best – develop software.



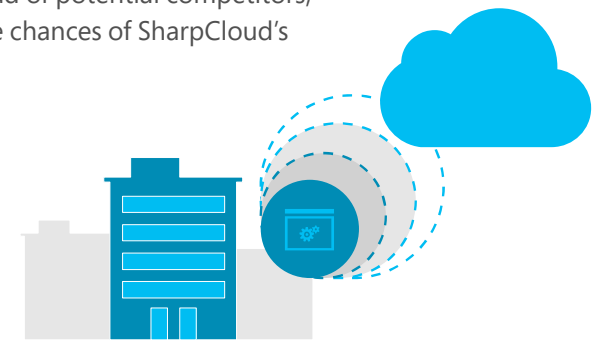
Global challenges

SharpCloud's global aspirations meant tackling unprecedented challenges. Khan understood that positioning a product is more than just having a large Rolodex of customers; it's about knowing their customer needs, how to implement a solution, and how to navigate the unique laws and regulations of each market. Security and data governance are business challenges that a Microsoft Partner can help navigate, and Azure security underscores a value that Microsoft adds to the partner relationship. "We don't really ever think that data security feels like a problem for people because the data is actually secured by Microsoft. There seems to be a lot of faith in the market. Enterprise feels very comfortable about data security with Microsoft" said Khan.

State-specific legislation regarding where data resides and how it is shared between data centers, clouds, and applications makes data governance extremely complex to understand – especially for a small company focused on developing a product. In SharpCloud's case, T-Systems Multimedia Solutions' deep expertise in data governance was instrumental in navigating the governance landscape. "To sell at an enterprise level, you have to find the right partners that understand governance for your key markets and territories. We work with T-Systems Multimedia Solutions because they've invested a lot of time and effort to understand the governance issues and how they manage them with customers," said Khan.

The future looks bright

Khan and his SharpCloud team have accomplished much more with their Microsoft Partner relationship than they could have alone. By reducing the time it takes to expose new customers to SharpCloud and by providing better support than they could have without T-Systems Multimedia Solutions, Khan and his team have been able to get ahead of potential competitors, further improving the chances of SharpCloud's long-term success.



Partners Help Drive Success

1 An idea takes shape

Long-term friends and business partners Sarim Khan and Rusty Johnson kick off their second venture: SharpCloud – a rich enterprise data visualization tool built to utilize Microsoft Azure, Microsoft Office 365 resources, and content from other applications.

2 Early development and implementation

SharpCloud developed and launched. German-based, Microsoft Gold Certified Partner T-Systems Multimedia Solutions uses SharpCloud and is impressed with the tool.

3 A need for a partner is realized

As more customers begin to use SharpCloud, Khan realizes that his team needs a strategic partner who can take their product to a wider market and allow his team to do what they do best: develop software.

4 A customer becomes a partner

SharpCloud and T-Systems Multimedia Solutions meet at the 2014 CeBIT conference and form a partnership to resell SharpCloud globally. This partnership includes consulting, integration, and hosting.

5 Early development and success

With valuable market advice and consultation services, T-Systems Multimedia Solutions helps SharpCloud navigate the data governance landscape and implementation of their enterprise. In one year, the partnership brings SharpCloud to new enterprise customers driving additional Azure implementations.



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