

WHITE PAPER

Insider Secrets to Building a Successful NetSuite Partner Practice





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Three NetSuite partners share their top insights, discuss their early challenges and reveal their strategies for achieving success in the partner program.

Few would dispute the business acumen of Henry Ford, who once said: “Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.” This advice applies solidly in the software arena, in which multiple entities converge to close deals, execute large- and small-scale solution implementations, and develop long-term working relationships between providers and customers.

This machine has a lot of moving parts: sales, development, implementation and support experience are required. Through the work of these partners, large software developers can reach a wider swath of customers who need their platforms to run their businesses.

Aligning with a major software partner isn't a decision to be taken lightly, nor can the effort be half-baked. To extract the highest value from these

relationships—and to ensure a win-win scenario for everyone involved—partners need a high level of buy-in and a commitment to succeeding over the long term.

In this white paper, we highlight the successful journeys of three different NetSuite partners, with an emphasis on the first steps that all partners should be taking, how to carve out a niche in the marketplace, creating a go-to-market strategy and developing a plan for ongoing success.

Connecting the Dots

In the U.S., companies with 500 or fewer employees number are about 30 million. That number grows by about 400,000 every year. Some are already using NetSuite, but many more are good candidates for a new cloud ERP implementation. As these companies outgrow fundamental software like QuickBooks and their Excel spreadsheets, NetSuite consistently rises to the top during the software selection process.

Eager to help “connect the dots” between the large ERP provider and customers, organizations like Crowe, The Vested Group and Solution Source all signed on as NetSuite partners. During the early stages of those partnerships, all three spent time determining their paths to success, setting up internal teams to manage the workload and developing marketing strategies around their new ventures.

Reflecting back to 2005, Adnan Patel, practice leader at Crowe, said the company spent about nine months looking at which ERP it could bring to market. Crowe was already doing both Oracle and Seibel consulting on large implementations, but it wanted to bring its enterprise experience to the mid-market.

“We got tired of traveling all over the world,” said Patel. “We felt like there was enough business in our backyard, where we could bring our enterprise ERP experience.”

With the advent of cloud at the time, Crowe considered NetSuite, Microsoft, Salesforce (from a pure CRM perspective) and Intacct. It chose NetSuite because it provided the business owner a single platform, eliminating worry about integrations for core business processes—from CRM to financials and lead-to-cash.

“Customers had a single system they could go to,” Patel said. “We felt we could bring our best practices from an implementation perspective to that market.”

Crowe also liked NetSuite’s overall model and mission, and how well it worked with its channel partners. The company spent a full year focused on learning the application and its capabilities.

According to The Vested Group’s Founder, Joel Patterson, the company joined the NetSuite partner program in 2011 with the mission of translating its

“We spent a full year working only on implementations, and relied heavily on the NetSuite channel team to advise us on how to implement, handle the technical ‘gotchas’ and learn how to qualify a customer. That guidance was really beneficial upfront. We sold NetSuite OneWorld to one customer, and the rest is history.”

Adnan Patel, Practice Leader, Crowe

existing skills to the cloud. With years of experience working with manufacturing customers and with other types of software, The Vested Group team came to market with NetSuite as its sole product.

“We wanted to make sure we controlled our own destiny, and that’s one thing I really like about the NetSuite program; as partners, we control the sales cycle from day one forward,” said Patterson. “We wanted to do our own sales and run our own demos, but we also have resources to lean on and qualified NetSuite experts who really understand the system.”

According to Ryan Britsch, operating partner at Solution Source, NetSuite’s biggest differentiator is the strength of its model. For example, it releases two predictable upgrades every year and provides a strong support structure for partners as they learn the new features and functionalities (then transfer that knowledge to their own end customers).

“As the platform expands, the strength of the NetSuite model has helped fuel our growth. That’s why we’ve stayed with NetSuite for as long as we have.”

Ryan Britsch, Operating Partner, Solution Source

Solution Source started its partner journey slowly, then grew that aspect of its business as it closed deals, reinvesting the money back into its business. As NetSuite expanded into manufacturing, the company was able to develop a profitable niche in the RV and trailer manufacturing space.

“That industry is in our backyard, and we already knew a lot about it,” said Britsch. “That helped reduce risk and minimize variability of budgets; it made for very happy customers and a lot of growth for us.”

Finding the Right Niche

A broadly-applicable platform and a good fit for many different types of business users, NetSuite makes finding a niche extremely important for partners that want to specialize. In fact, finding and exploiting a specialization—be it vertical or horizontal in nature—is often the leading indicator of a partner’s success.

“Getting into a niche really makes a difference,” said Patterson, whose firm has carved out its place in the manufacturing, recycling and e-waste industries. An early adopter of SuiteSuccess methodologies, The Vested Group took advantage of the NetSuite tools meant to simplify implementations and lower risk.

“SuiteSuccess gives us the tools we need to improve the experience and without restricting what we can deliver to the client,” said Patterson, whose team taps into NetSuite’s baseline functionality and prescriptive models to control scope and handle basic blocking and tackling—even to handle SOWs.



“These are things that can be hard to manage,” said Patterson, “and NetSuite removes those barriers for us.”

For Solution Source, picking a niche and building upon that was a no-brainer right out of the gate.

“The more you know an industry and start serving the same customer set, the fewer surprises there are,” said Britsch, who also sees this as a viable business generation tool. “Word gets around.”

From a strategic perspective, Solution Source also focused on developing a recurring revenue model that would allow it to build upon its successes over time, versus just managing projects on a one-off basis. Like TVG, it has used SuiteSuccess and SuiteApps to develop its own intellectual property (IP).

“We sell modules like NetSuite does,” said Britsch, “and create revenue for ourselves while also providing a high level of value for our clients.”

By combining SuiteSuccess with an industry vertical, NetSuite partners can effectively combine two well-defined areas of a sales cycle and use them to their advantage.

“With SuiteSuccess, NetSuite gives you this documentation, process flows and step-by-step instructions on how to sell,” said Patel. “You can tweak it, but you still have the basic framework required to sell cloud ERP successfully.”

Patel said SuiteSuccess also helps new partners get up and running faster, without having to spend years learning the system and racking up successful implementations.

Rallying the Troops

Where NetSuite provides software and support for companies that it aligns with, those companies also need buy-in, sweat equity and perseverance to drive their own success. For example, Crowe put much time and effort into creating its own

“With NetSuite, you can iterate faster, show prospects that you’ve been doing it forever, and build confidence during the implementation process. It also eliminates a lot of fuzziness in scoping out projects. Within that framework, you can move faster through the sales cycle without impacting the quality of what you’re trying to do.”

Adnan Patel, Practice Leader, Crowe

marketing collateral, updating its website to reflect its new partnership and developing a viable sales approach. It selected a handful of employees to focus 100% of their efforts on selling and supporting NetSuite, and relied on its new partner to help it qualify sales leads and readily identify potential objections.

“We were able to quickly qualify those leads before pulling them over to more expensive resources,” said Patel. “Using NetSuite materials, we enabled ourselves pretty quickly, learned which functionalities were standard/out-of-the-box and honed our approach. As a result, we become self-sufficient pretty quickly.”

Patterson said his last company represented six or seven different software vendors. That changed when The Vested Group was founded with a NetSuite-only focus.

“We picked this path because with the market NetSuite has, along with its architecture and the functionality, there’s no need for another cloud-based package,” said Patterson. “We’ve maintained our focus on NetSuite, and I don’t see that changing anytime soon.”

This approach has worked well for The Vested Group, which sees very few “bake-offs” among ERP software providers these days. Whereas in the past, a customer may have wanted to compare across different options and see demos of each, most come to the table knowing that they want NetSuite. Patterson said some of that is due to NetSuite’s universal appeal.

“We have everything from the pre-revenue customer to the \$1.5 billion cable customer that runs its entire business on NetSuite,” he said.

Britsch concurred, adding the mention of a potential bake-off raises red flags at Solution Source, which knows it’s dealing with a prospect that may not understand the marketplace and/or its own business pain points.

“When the request to compare software solutions arises, we shift the conversation to the prospect’s business needs and what problems need to be solved,” said Britsch. “We do the demos targeted to their major goals, show them we can do and off we go to do the deal.”

Creating a Successful Go-to-Market Strategy

All three partners agree that creating a solid go-to-market strategy requires a good idea of your target market and a willingness to invest in your people and the partnership itself. For example, Crowe has experts certified in areas like manufacturing and supply chain who are involved with those industries from a networking and social perspective.

“It’s all about relationship building,” said Patel, “so we align closely with those niches and contribute to those groups.”

Patterson said The Vested Group never takes its foot off the sales and marketing gas pedal. It gets about 60% of its new deals through the relationships it has developed with influencers who refer potential clients to The Vested Group.

“Developing relationships is where you’ll get the bulk of your work,” said Patterson. “That can be difficult to forecast, but if you can continue to develop it and be topical and current, you’ll be served well there.”

As it continues to hone its go-to-market strategy and grow its NetSuite practice, Solution Source will continue to focus on industry specialization.

“The more specific you get, the easier it is to identify new customers,” said Britsch, who tells new partners to join industry associations and buying groups, and attend industry events.

“Craft a message around your domain expertise, and tailor it to your customers’ pains. This will make whatever marketing you’re doing 10 times more effective.”

Ryan Britsch, Operating Partner, Solution Source



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www.netsuite.com



info@netsuite.com

877-638-7848