

It is often described as the most underrated and unappreciated job within any vendor - the channel manager or, as it has now been elevated to of late, the channel executive. Stuck between the rock that is their vendor employer demanding ever-increasing revenues to meet never-descending targets, and the hard place that is the channel partner insisting on anything and everything they perceive as a sweeter deal, not many covet the role, nor the title within organisations. Those that do, though, are a breed apart in the IT industry.

While the channel manager may be well known within the circle of their respective channels, it is not often that the spotlight falls on them - especially in the media. If ever they do get coverage in a magazine or newsletter article, it is usually in the role of company spokesperson cum spindoctor as they try to repair damage done to their channel, more often than not by someone a lot higher up the corporate ladder. It was with this in mind that we started our annual feature profiling them more than half a decade ago.

As far as we know, this is the only time in a publication that many of them can bask in a little limelight, let their partners know what they like and dislike about the channel, some of the trials and tribulations they are faced with, and even where the best place is to take them if a favour is needed. This year there are some new faces, but there are also some old ones too - a sure sign of the resilience of channel managers. Unfortunately, there are also some noticeable absentees who have passed up the opportunity of free editorial - or maybe they just don't want to be harassed by partners at their favourite watering holes. It doesn't matter, we still salute you as we do all the other channel managers without whom the channel would undoubtedly be a much duller place ...

Top of the Meet the

Lawrence van Namen, Lexmark South Africa

How did you get involved in the channel: I have always been involved with the channel as far back as I can remember from my selling and product marketing days at Lexmark

What does it take to be a good channel executive: Strong relationships, a good understanding of your partners, plenty of patience and a cast-iron liver

What is your strength in dealing with partners: Our strength lies in our channel-centric business model, our relationships, local stock holding, flexibility and strong product offering

What do you like about the channel: The diversity of people and businesses - the strength they offer in coverage and penetration of the market. I also like the fact that they always surprise you

What do you dislike about the channel: I dislike brand-hopping - switching brands happens faster than a five-year-old with a DSTV remote control

Worst-ever personal experience in the channel: My worst experience was the fall of Siltek - we had just appointed them as a distributor

How could partners make your job easier: Choose a brand you believe in and stick to it, also forecasting would be fantastic

Favourite restaurant/pub: Primi Piatti in the Design Quarter



Deon Botha, LG Electronics

How did you get involved in the channel: I have been in the channel for a number of years in various capacities, but actively managing channel business when I started at LG in 2000 as national sales manager

What does it take to be a good channel exec: Understanding your customer's business and the challenges that they face. The market changes at a rapid pace and the vendor must endeavour to change as rapidly as the market does

What is your strength in dealing with partners: I try to put myself in their shoes and try to see the market from their perspective

What do you like about the channel: Seeing the value that my product brings to my partners

What do you dislike about the channel: As probably everyone would agree; the effect the "credit crunch" has on resellers and retailers and the volatility of the exchange rate

Worst-ever personal experience in the channel: ...

How could partners make your job easier: Purchase more product

Favourite restaurant/pub: No specific favourite, I love to try out new restaurants all the time

the class ...

channel executives

Howard Valentine, Axis Communications SA



How did you get involved in the channel: I have always been interested in the IT industry. I joined Comztek as a junior product manager and later became a channel manager

What does it take to be a good channel exec: Diplomacy and a lot of patience

What is your strength in dealing with partners: I do my best to remain impartial/neutral. Partners feel comfortable working with me knowing that they will always get an unbiased opinion and that they can trust me with confidential information

What do you like about the channel: Interacting with a variety of businesses and understanding their operations. Meeting new, sometimes interesting people

What do you dislike about the channel: When companies cannot obtain a fair competitive advantage and use underhanded tactics to secure business

Worst-ever personal experience in the channel: Nothing comes to mind. However, I will make it known when it does happen – thanks to social media

How could partners make your job easier: Become more proactive. Do some research on the products that their company sells and the environment in which their business operates

Favourite restaurant/pub: Hodges, Craighall Park

Gina Santos, APC by Schneider Electric



How did you get involved in the channel: I was working for APC beforehand in marketing department

What does it take to be a good channel exec: Dedication, determination and, most importantly, building strong relationships with distributors and resellers

What is your strength in dealing with partners: Communication, educating on the APC product range and supporting them in closing sales

What do you like about the channel: Reliable and ethical

What do you dislike about the channel: There's nothing that I dislike

Worst-ever personal experience in the channel: None

How could partners make your job easier: Use our web site - it is filled with detailed information

Favourite restaurant/pub: Baron on Fredman Drive or Main Road

Max Stone, Motorola



How did you get involved in the channel: Prior to Motorola acquiring Symbol Technologies in 2007, I transitioned Symbol from a direct to an indirect sales model in South Africa, establishing two distributors

What does it take to be a good channel exec: Consistency and being a first-class negotiator are probably the two most important characteristics. Being open, honest and ethical are essential

What is your strength in dealing with partners: After 10 years of building a channel for Motorola, I believe that I can recognise the true value proposition a partner can offer (often there is none), positioning this value with our technology and identifying and reducing risks to close a deal

What do you like about the channel: The channel broadens our reach into markets that would be difficult to tackle directly and helps to create opportunities based on existing relationships that may have taken years to develop. The channel opens doors and helps to break down barriers that otherwise would have stalled potential business

What do you dislike about the channel: Some resellers do not develop their own resources or value-added offering and then expect the vendor to take responsibility for post-sale support

Worst-ever personal experience in the channel: Probably being accused of unprofessional and unethical behaviour when I refused to support an uncertified reseller that was trying to muscle in on a deal at the 11th hour

How could partners make your job easier: I would like our partners to have the confidence to involve us earlier in deals when there is still an opportunity to influence the customer's buying criteria

Favourite restaurant/pub: Any real waterhole in the bush with the sun setting and the animals coming down to drink. We call it "magic hour" - when the world stands still and everything is at peace



**Richard Mowbray,
Mimecast South
Africa**

How did you get involved in the channel:

In 2002 I worked as a SME channel manager at a large ISP, developing relationships with a number of smaller IT companies and systems

integrators that would resell the ISP's products and services

What does it take to be a good channel exec:

You need to understand the product, and the value it will add to the market

What is your strength in dealing with partners:

To succinctly show prospective partners how remarkable the Mimecast service is, and how they can secure a long-term annuity revenue stream by passing this knowledge on to their customers

What do you like about the channel:

I can contribute to helping our partners build a sustainable annuity revenue stream, while assisting their customers to take away the costs, complexities and management overheads surrounding e-mail

What do you dislike about the channel:

I dislike the bad name that some companies have given to legitimate channel partner programmes by selling products and offering professional services in direct competition with their own loyal channel partners

Worst-ever personal experience in the channel:

A few years ago, at one of my previous employers, our financial director refused a good channel partner - who marginally missed the annual revenue target - the annual rebate. It broke my heart. I learnt that if the partner was more aware of their current position, they could have made more effort to achieve their target

How could partners make your job easier:

By doing a correct "needs analysis" and qualifying the budget and time constraint for each new prospect. This would give us all more realistic pipelines and budgets and generally ensure that we put the right levels of energy into the right deals. By having more information at the beginning of the sales process we could work together to close the deals faster

Favourite restaurant/pub: For a social evening, Dros; for a business meeting, a Baron

Jane Tully, Fujitsu

How did you get involved in the channel: It was a natural progression as the company has always been a channel-centric organisation with a commitment to the channel. I have always had good sales experience and strong people skills and when the opportunity to work within the channel presented itself, I leapt at the chance

What does it take to be a good channel exec: Understanding the needs of the local channel market and adapting the organisation to meet those requirements

What is your strength in dealing with partners: Being able to take an objective view in complicated channel conflicts between partners

Maïke Liebenberg, Citrix Systems South Africa

How did you get involved in the channel: I initially held the positions of vendor alliance manager and branch manager at two large learning centres. I then moved to Workgroup, where I was the Citrix product manager for over two years. This eventually led to me taking up the position of partner account manager at Citrix Systems South Africa

What does it take to be a good channel exec: Understanding your partners, their business, vision and their dynamics

What is your strength in dealing with partners: Availability, openness and receptiveness. I enjoy interacting with people on various levels and assisting in their development and success

What do you like about the channel: I appreciate channel partners that have, and continue to focus and invest in our technology as they then become an extension of the Citrix team

What do you dislike about the channel: The business and solution opportunities are immense, yet it seems that most partners congregate and focus around certain "hot" opportunities. Another bugbear of mine is the lack of investment in skills and training both on a sales and a technical level

How could partners make your job easier: By downscaling the number of products that they take on, thereby giving themselves more time to understand, research and specialise in what they are providing instead of supplying a diverse basket of offerings that are not fully understood

Favourite restaurant/pub: Schwabinger Stuben

Zak Evans, Aastra Telecom South Africa

How did you get involved in the channel: As a reseller Account Executive back in 1999, then as the channel manager for Ericsson Enterprise in 2006

What does it take to be a good channel exec: Relationship management first backed by strong communication skills

What is your strength in dealing with partners: Diplomatic approach to the operational and functional issues that arise in all channels

What do you like about the channel: The social networking aspect

What do you dislike about the channel: Hard to find exclusive partnerships

Worst-ever personal experience in the channel: Usually I don't kiss and tell - but, seriously, I've actually had a very positive run to date with nothing really bad to comment on

How could partners make your job easier: Partners are able to contribute sales, presales and technical resources and experience over a largely distributed geographical area, assisting to support our customers more efficiently and effectively

Favourite restaurant/pub: Fish and Wine Company, Design Quarter

Derek Rule, Xiotech Africa

How did you get involved in the channel: I have worked on both channel sales and direct/reseller sales over the years

What does it take to be a good channel exec: Passion for your product

What is your strength in dealing with partners: I make sure it's a relationship, rather than a partnership which means you are both working it and living it together. I am 100% loyal to resellers, taking the good times with the bad

What do you like about the channel: More feet on the ground. You have a lot more people spreading the word about your product

What do you dislike about the channel: Not having complete control over the sales process with the end user

Worst-ever personal experience in the channel: Losing a deal on price. When you have a quality product and it is adding value, price should not come into the equation

How could partners make your job easier: They should take time out to learn about the product so that the customer is hearing the correct value message

Favourite restaurant/pub: The Bayside Café in Camps Bay - before the floods hit



What do you like about the channel: The eagerness of our partners to succeed

What do you dislike about the channel: I don't like it when I encounter partners who behave dishonestly

Worst-ever personal experience in the channel: Terminating a partner due to lack of commitment and general bad business practice

How could partners make your job easier: They are our sales force, so all knowledge that they obtain, particularly through product and sales training, makes them more effective

Favourite restaurant/pub: QBa



Jacqui Scorgie, Softline Accpac

How did you get involved in the channel:

I started out as product manager of Accpac. The position became more one of assisting the channel and my role evolved to that of channel manager

What does it take to be a good channel exec:

A thorough understanding of employees' needs and the market in which they compete and operate; softer people skills; act in the best interest of employees; make sure employees have sufficient knowledge, expertise and skills; and make sure to stay as involved as possible

What is your strength in dealing with partners:

I am very approachable, honest and understanding and have built long-lasting relationships based on mutual trust and understanding. They also know that I will do whatever I can to help them out in any situation

What do you like about the channel: We are a family. Some of our channel partners have been with us since inception and others for more than 10 years

What do you dislike about the channel: The competitive undercurrent among the different partners is a challenge

Worst-ever personal experience in the channel:

Getting involved in a disagreement at a channel conference and trying to "keep the peace" in the channel

How could partners make your job easier:

By utilising the offered training and available resources to gain more experience, knowledge and skill

Favourite restaurant/pub: Karma



Nicholas O'Connor, Acer Africa

How did you get involved in the channel:

Entered the industry as GM of Sales for Spartan Computer Rentals in 1998, and joined Acer in 2000 as sales manager. I left the industry in 2003, but rejoined Graham Braum's Acer team as

channel manager in 2008

What does it take to be a good channel exec: I believe you need to be fair, firm and fun

What is your strength in dealing with partners: Respect for the principles required for the effective operation of a 100% indirect two-tier distribution model

Prabashni Pillay, Cisco

How did you get involved in the channel: I have been in a channel-related role for more than 10 years now

What does it take to be a good channel exec: For me, it's commitment, honesty, respect and the ability to build strong relationships with partners

What is your strength in dealing with partners: Open, honest communication is at the core of building strong relationships. Without transparency and honesty, it's difficult for both companies to be successful. By working together and really listening and understanding what the core needs are, it's possible to bring together elements that create a win-win scenario for all parties

What do you like about the channel: I enjoy the ability to influence business decisions - especially around revenue growth, strategic planning and most importantly, the opportunity to build long-term relationships. In addition, there's never a dull moment in the channel - this industry is fast-paced, dynamic, inspirational and that motivates me to new heights

What do you dislike about the channel: Price wars. My philosophy is sell the value, differentiate, find new ways to set yourself apart from the pack. Don't succumb to selling down to get the deal. There's so much value in great solutions. Focus on that. Ultimately you win in the long run when you look at value in the long term rather than a quick fix

Worst-ever personal experience in the channel: Some of the situations I find more challenging are managing issues around Cisco brand protection as well as those of our partner organisations and customers from grey market or counterfeit products

How could partners make your job easier: Complete transparency, including raising issues early on - regardless of what they may be - so we can solve them sooner rather than later

Favourite restaurant/pub: Primi Piatti Plush in Sandridge Mall



Laurica Pieterse, Pastel Payroll

How did you get involved in the channel: I joined the newly-formed Softline Pastel Payroll channel five years ago as a channel liaison officer - we now have a team of more than 10 dedicated to managing and nurturing our channel

What does it take to be a good channel exec: Self-motivated and project-driven individuals do best in the channel. Communication skills are vital. It also requires determination to assist channel partners to optimise their businesses and achieve their goals as well as your own.

What is your strength in dealing with partners: I am a good communicator and I am able to grow and maintain relationships very successfully. Being focused and forthright, I set clear goals and co-operatively drive people to achieve them

What do you like about the channel: I love the passion that our channel exudes for the software they sell and support. They take the initiative in pursuing new avenues, not just in their own businesses, but also in ours.

What do you dislike about the channel: This is more of a frustration than a dislike, but it is sometimes difficult to achieve a balance between the missions and visions of channel partner dealerships and the vendor company. From experience, though, trust comes with time

Worst-ever personal experience in the channel: Seeing a channel partner fail despite pulling out all the stops and the best efforts of all involved

How could partners make your job easier: By ensuring that their side of the communications channel is always open. We can only assist, no matter what the issue, if we are kept informed

Favourite restaurant/pub: Ghazal's in Sunninghill



What do you like about the channel: The strong friendships which are formed despite the competitive nature of the industry

What do you dislike about the channel: That only one deserving reseller can win each deal

Worst-ever personal experience in the channel: Knowing that a hard-working value adding reseller is about to lose a deal to direct competition

How could partners make your job easier: By clearly understanding their value proposition; and setting clear expectations.

Favourite restaurant/pub: Radium Beer Hall (considered one of, if not the, oldest beer-serving establishment in Johannesburg)

**Evershree
Mathadeen,
Eaton Power
Quality**

How did you get involved in the channel: I entered the channel when I started working for HP as an HP Carepack Specialist



What does it take to be a good channel exec: You need to keep up with market trends, be a good leader, and set product and service benchmarks. The pace of this industry is fearsome and, to keep it together, you need to have drive, self-motivation and be results-oriented at all times

What is your strength in dealing with partners: Strong relationships are key

What do you like about the channel: Our IT distributors and resellers are able to venture into niche markets as they have a strong understanding of specific market segments and the end customer often trusts their judgement because of their specialised understanding

What do you dislike about the channel: The sales staff throughout the channel have too many product sets to sell and as a result tend to focus on select products only

Worst-ever personal experience in the channel: With any job there will be ups and downs. However, keeping a clear and positive head will allow anyone to overcome any situation

How could partners make your job easier: Partners could start to initiate training programmes, mentoring schemes and support services in order to educate and support the channel

Favourite restaurant/pub: Rodizio

Trish Simpson, 3Com Africa

How did you get involved in the channel: I started working for a distributor in the late 1980s. Many of the big brands in IT had closed their local operations because of sanctions, so the channel was playing an enormous role, and I was soon hooked. After working in distribution for many years, I moved to the vendor side at Compaq/HP and, now, 3Com

What does it take to be a good channel exec: Walk the talk - deliver what you say you're going to do and, if possible, over-deliver. Be consistent, be ethical. You need to ensure that vendor strategies are clearly communicated and that distributors and resellers understand the direction your company is moving in, so they can align their business to support yours

What is your strength in dealing with partners: Consistency and passion. I'm passionate about what I do. But I also understand that consistency is important in this job. That's the only way to ensure messaging is on target and that you are able to deal with any issues that may arise

What do you like about the channel: The fabulous partnerships and loyalties built over the years. The channel is an extended sales force and deals are won through forging strong partnerships and working together closely to achieve the same goals

What do you dislike about the channel: It's a high-pressure, stressful environment to work in – especially during times of economic recession

Worst-ever personal experience in the channel: The demise of Siltek Distribution Dynamics and the impact it had on the entire IT industry

How could partners make your job easier: By understanding the constraints and parameters faced by a global player, and that it sometimes takes time to make decisions

Favourite restaurant/pub: Casalinga Italian restaurant in Muldersdrift for snug fires in winter and a glass (or two!) of fine red



Reon Coetzee, Toshiba South Africa

How did you get involved in the channel: I started as a junior salesperson at a distributor in 1997

What does it take to be a good channel exec: You need to understand the market and the channel's requirements. You need to make your products freely available to them with the correct pricing structure, backup and support so that they can be competitive and profitable

What is your strength in dealing with partners: Flexible is probably the best way to describe it. Listening to our partners and providing a workable solution to them

What do you dislike about the channel: Nothing really ...

Worst-ever personal experience in the channel: Let's rather not discuss that ...

How could partners make your job easier: Constant feedback and suggestion. I am a firm believer that there is always room for improvement

Favourite restaurant/pub: Any restaurant that serves good steak and any pub that serves a decent brandy



Sandy Redgate, SAP

How did you get involved in the channel: Quite by accident – I had an opportunity to work in a telesales team at Lonnet, the networking division of ICL, and progressed from there into sales and eventually into channel management at various companies, most of them multinationals

What does it take to be a good channel exec: Patience, determination and the drive to manage all types of situations. It requires considerable diplomacy to handle differing vendor and partner objectives. Good interpersonal skills are critical in such a position

What is your strength in dealing with partners: Building strong relationships based on trust

What do you like about the channel: I enjoy working with partners and being part of making relationships work between them and their suppliers. It is satisfying to take a product and create a unique value proposition for each partner, mould it to their circumstances and objectives, and witness their success

What do you dislike about the channel: Unnecessary conflict and mistrust created by unethical behaviour

Worst-ever personal experience in the channel: Fortunately nothing springs to mind

How could partners make your job easier: By consistently achieving their revenue targets and performing according to their agreed business plans

Favourite restaurant/pub: One that serves good sushi and wine

