

### AVOIDING THE AARDVARK EFFECT BEST PRACTICE IN PRESENTATION OF PARTNER LOCATORS

Phil Gowing is Operations Director at bChannels and has worked on the re-development of partner locators for a wide range of vendors. In this article he reviews best practice and highlights key trends in this area.

#### What is the 'Aardvark Effect'?

"Many partner locators present the end-customer with an alphabetical list of partners," says Gowing. "It's a similar experience if you search for a local taxi service. The first page of search results lists all the companies beginning with the letter 'A'. Call yourself 'Aardvark Taxis' and you get to be top of the list."

Gowing points out that relatively few partner locators actually take into account the needs of the user. "Presenting the user with a list of all your Gold level partners, for example is not helpful. What I want to know as a user is why I would select one partner over another. Which partner best fits my need?"

Most end customers are more interested in the fit of the partner than they are in geographic location, which in many locators is another key search criteria. "Would you choose a company that happened to be close to your office," asks Gowing, "if they were not best for the job? Of course not."

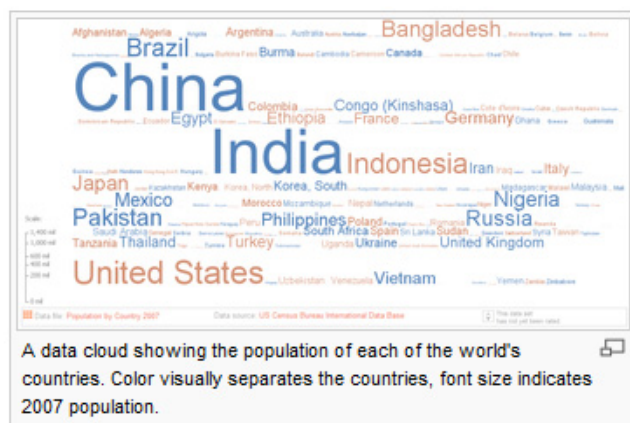
#### It's All About Data

"Start with data," says Gowing. If you are to fit a partner to a customer need then you have to know what the partner is good at. Is this partner strongest with SMB customers or large corporates? Do they specialize in particular vertical markets? Do they provide hosted solutions?

"We find that for many of our clients," says Gowing, "that this data actually exists in the organization somewhere, it's just not linked into the partner locator because nobody realized it should be."

#### Planning the User Experience

The best partner locators offer the user an easy way to identify partners that meet the need. "Use of tag clouds is increasing," points out Gowing. "These allow the solutions and specialisms that are offered by a greater number of partners to be presented in larger text. The user can quickly see if they are searching for a mainstream or niche partner."



## Traffic, Experience, Measurement

Successful vendors drive traffic to their partner locator by marketing their partner programs to end customers. This proves to the partner that the locator is a benefit.

When the customer reaches the locator it needs to be easy to use and it needs to present partners in a way that is relevant to the customer, not just to the vendor.

"Finally," says Gowing, "the vendor needs to gather information about click-throughs and share it with partners. This is vital in underlining the benefit of the locator for partners. "Our most sophisticated clients can show partners what percentage of click-throughs they are getting with customers who have needs relevant to their specific services."

Note: for examples of partner locator good practice visit the Cisco and Intel sites at:  
<http://tools.cisco.com/WWChannels/LOCATR/openBasicSearch.do>  
<http://premierlocator.intel.com>

## bChannels Analysis

A key message here is that a partner locator is more than a 'phone book'. Too few technology companies take the trouble to make their locator effective in driving sales through partners. This is not about finding a partner, it is about finding the right partner.

Tag clouds and click-through reporting are key trends to note.

bChannels is a specialist in the development and management of indirect partner channels for companies in the technology market. We work with many of the world's leading technology businesses.

Every quarter we run an Executive Forum where we bring together a small group of senior channel marketing executives from non-competing vendors to discuss a specific issue and share best practice.



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