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### **SOLVING THE CHANNEL MAZE**

European channel consultant Francis Tchertoff looks at building indirect routes to market starting from the customer. \*

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#### **Starting from the customer**

Vendors often have a 'top down' approach to their channel. They talk about how they need to recruit this or that type of channel partner to sell to this or that type of end user. "This approach to development of a route to market reminds me of one of those maze puzzles we used to do as kids" says Tchertoff. "You could play the game the hard way or the easy way. The hard way is to start from the outside and work in, bumping into dead ends until you're lucky enough to find the centre. The easy way is to start at the centre and work out."

"As kids we all did it the easy way. Now as grown-up channel professionals here we are doing it the hard way again."

Tchertoff explains: "The customer obviously sits in the middle of the channel marketing maze. If you start there, then it's much easier."

#### **Assessing buying behaviour**

Customer buying behavior can vary enormously between vertical markets, between different types of technology solution, between countries. "Perhaps the only rule", says Tchertoff, "is that there are no rules".

"What you look for is patterns. You focus on the customers in the market that you are targeting and look at how they buy, who they buy from, what drives that decision. That will lead you to the channel partners you need."

#### **Applying the learnings in the printer industry**

Tchertoff has worked extensively in the European printer market. "Take wide-format colour inkjet printing as an example", he says. These machines are targeting a niche market, print shops, graphic design and advertising agencies. Some of these are independent businesses, others are in-house departments in larger organizations.

"Many of these places use Apple technology", he says. "Apple took a big share of that market in the 1980's. But not in all countries. Germany for example is not so Apple-friendly, although things are changing."

"The way into this market is through the end customer", explains Tchertoff. "Simply asking the customer who they buy from and why will provide you with the details of the specialist resellers you need to access."

“It’s surprising how little research is required to identify the buying patterns that matter.”

### **Building distribution channels**

Tchertoff explains that he has used the same approach to build effective distribution relationships. Resellers who sell wide-format printers to specialist customers don’t buy from broadline distribution.

“You track back from the customer to the reseller to the distributor”, says Tchertoff.

“This type of research costs money”, he agrees, “but so does getting lost in the maze. I’ve made the investment many times and it always pays off”.

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### **bChannels Analysis**

Like most good ideas, this sounds so obvious that you wonder if anybody would do it any other way. But they do. All too often we work with clients who are solving the maze the hard way.

Customer and channel research is a key part of bChannels proven approach to assessing the health of an indirect route to market.

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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.



**bChannels Executive Forum July 2007  
'Selling Services Through Channels'**

If you are interested in attending an Executive Forum, or you would like to know more about our services in general, please contact Matt Rowland-Jones on +44 (0) 1865 368587 or [matt@bchannels.com](mailto:matt@bchannels.com). You can also visit our website at [www.bchannels.com](http://www.bchannels.com).

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\* Please note that the opinions expressed in this document are the personal views of the interviewee and should not be taken as representative of the approach of the company for whom the interviewee works.