

Working with, not against each other

Partners Need More Room To Breathe, Not Less

It is in large part thanks to its community that SAP was able to advance to a world market leader in business software. It's high time to give back.

By Hans Haselbeck, Empirius

The partner network that SAP has created over the years, which comprises a total of about 15,000 companies, is certainly unique. A lot has changed since the company sprung into existence on April 1, 1972. The community and SAP had to reinvent themselves again and again in the fast-moving IT industry. Examples include client-server systems with AnyDB, mySAP, Hana including S/4 or now RISE with SAP.

Migration concerns

Of course, only the minority of SAP customers always immediately embrace every change the ERP company proposes. The community tends to react with a time lag. The most recent example is RISE with SAP. The initiative is being promoted overzealously by SAP and is almost tantamount to glorifying the company's own cause. However, there is still a lack of broad customer commitment. It could still happen, though – hope dies last, after all. In contrast, some partners have been and still are quick to jump on SAP's bandwagon whenever the opportunity presents itself, often in the hopes of benefitting from the innovations.

More equal than others

However, SAP has always made an effort to orchestrate the community, which often results in some partners being more equal than others in collaboration efforts. From a customer and partner perspective, it's sometimes hard to understand why some companies are favored by SAP, since these decisions are never communicated transparently. Furthermore, SAP doesn't care whether partners are even able to invest in SAP innovations, carry out new developments, build up know-how and resources, and so on. Caring about these things could, however, result in much needed tailwind for SAP's initiatives.

The partner business, which should ideally be based on cooperation, becomes somewhat complicated when SAP enters a market segment with its own product, solution, or services and thus makes life difficult for partners.

King among databases

The exclusive availability of S/4 on SAP's Hana database is certainly a special case. This move was more or less intended to push out long-time partner and competitor Oracle - and unfortunately also ended up alienating IBM and Microsoft.

However, this is not the way to go. Let's ask ourselves: Would SAP even have become world market leader without Oracle (and IBM and Microsoft) as a partner? That's a question worth discussing. And: Didn't SAP say that it wanted to become a leading general provider in database management with Hana? Strange, considering that in no „DB Engines Ranking“ has Hana ever been among the top ten databases, but the king (meaning Oracle) has never been toppled.

Affronted

From time to time, SAP also talks to partners directly to warn them away from a certain market segment or unsettle them. However, this is often done by SAP sales or marketing teams, who seem to be

following their own narrative. In this context, SAP would be well advised to always encourage partners and give them more breathing room instead of cutting them off. SAP partners are regarded by SAP customers as trusted advisors. Accordingly, customers value partners as effectively neutral entities and look to them for advice and answers to a wide range of questions about SAP and related infrastructures. Moreover, customers often value partner expertise and advice more highly than that of SAP. SAP should always be aware of this and take it to heart. Last but not least, partners also help SAP's cause: If SAP gives its partners enough breathing room, the company itself also benefits!



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