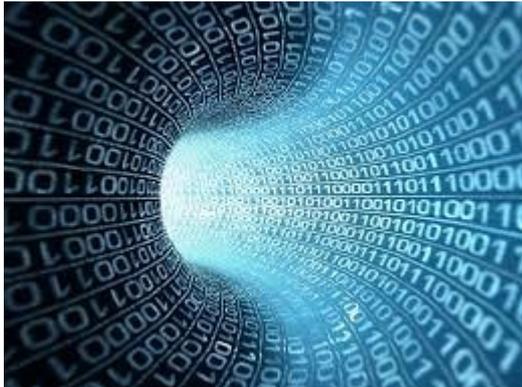


By Janees Reghelini May 28th, 2014



Reseller ME finds out how the channel players can penetrate the Big Data space to offer value-added services in the region.

Big Data has been a buzz word for a few years now. 2013 was the year, it caught everyone's attention and 2014 is supposed to see Big Data deployments moving from pilot to production, according to IDC. However, Big Data has a long way to go, as far as the region is concerned. Yes, the customers and partners are better aware today and have a keen sense to learn more but we have only scratched the tip of the iceberg yet. Big Data

has the potential to transform the world we know it. According to a report in Forbes last year, Big Data is not a buzzword anymore but a movement. And this is precisely why channel partners need to get even more serious about this emerging trend as it presents an ocean of opportunities.

Opportunities

According to Abdullah Al-Swaha Director, Partner Organisation & Commercial Cisco, Middle East Region, the Big Data explosion has given rise to business intelligence data mining and analytics spanning market research, behavioural modeling, and inference-based decision.

“Resellers in the Middle East have an opportunity to help enterprises address the Big Data challenge with a new set of software and solutions. The greatest opportunity for the channel lies in providing consultancy to enterprises on how to address business problems by tapping into the potential of Big Data. The channel could look at elevating itself to becoming true partners of enterprises.”

Most channel players agree that the next step would, indeed, be taking the role of consultants for their customers. And in the last year or so, we have heard innumerable times, how the channel should shift away from box moving to offering value-added services, but what kind of services can it leverage from?

Apart from becoming trusted advisors, Big Data also gives the channel new opportunities to create and develop new analytical services where resellers can take concrete Big Data business models to their customers, says Havier Haddad, Channel Manager, Turkey, Emerging Africa & Middle East, EMC. “For example, resellers will be able to approach retailers and explain the business value of customer geo-location data, showing how it can be utilised to enhance the customer experience in-store and encourage them to make the most of relevant offers and promotions.” This will help channel partners to expand their portfolio of solutions, services and certifications and also enable them to widen their vertical reach and expertise. Haddad believes this will create new opportunities for growth and sustainable competitive differentiation.



Vsevolod Ivanov, Deputy CEO, InfoWatch Group of Companies adds, “The channel partners can offer their clients data analysis solution not only as information security software but as Big Data analysis system, as efficient analytical tool, which allows reducing financial losses at early stages and preventively influence the areas of potential business threats.”

What’s more, with IDC forecasts indicating that the Big Data technology and services market will increase from a 27 percent compound annual growth rate to \$32.4 billion through 2017, channel partners must ready themselves today in order to face this growth. John Banks, Director, Software Group, Gulf Business Machines (GBM) says, “That is six times the growth rate of the overall ICT market. Systems integrators, value-added resellers and service providers are in a good position to take advantage of this market with Big Data consulting services and software resale.”

Big Data cannot be looked at singularly, it is impacted by social media, cloud and mobile technology. As these technologies get more sophisticated, the amount and complexity of data also increases. It definitely makes the business environment even more challenging, however, partners could look at it as an opportunity to introduce new and better products. Keeping in line with market demands is the first rule of this business, and with that in mind, Big Data certainly offers the potential to be innovators.

Describing other opportunities that these trends bring into Big Data, Raj Wannappa, General Manager, Big Data, Dimension Data Middle East and Africa says, “Social media and mobility bring about opportunities that include providing for the basic storage, compute and bandwidth requirements, then data extraction and cleansing followed by analytics and visualisation. These services can be offered on an on-premise, hosted or fully managed service.”

However, the channel must immediately look at identifying a niche within this space and offering services. Bobby Joseph, Data Practice – Head, Data Science Technologies believes services is definitely the way to go ahead. He says, “Servicing will become a core part of the selling effort and products and brands will start to diminish. The channel will have to identify the vertical and niche areas of service to survive through this.” He adds newer and broader approaches to selling, integrating and servicing the customer have to be adopted.

What is essential to note is the fact that for the channel to take advantage of emerging trends such as Big Data, it must be first educated in the opportunities present in the market. Data Science Technologies, a subsidiary of StorIT for Big Data analytics, has initiated a channel development programme to enable its reseller partners with the knowledge, tools and necessary skills to identify and address the high-growth potential opportunities for Big Data in the Middle East. Joseph adds, “Educating the channel is key to educating enterprises about the value of harnessing their Big Data. Not many in the channel have the knowledge or the skilled resources to translate the potential of Big Data in enterprise organisations into actionable insights.” It’s only when the channel is clear about the opportunities and avenues present, can partners advise customers on enhancing their business. And in some cases, channel partners could lead with identifying new prospects.

Haider Al-Seaidy, Solutions Architect, Qlik Middle East and Africa adds, “Channel partners that can advise on approaches to consolidate multiple sources and types of data and provide data discovery solutions to their clients will have a strategic advantage.”



According to Haddad, channel partners looking to effectively build a Big Data portfolio should begin investing in the right assets, that is, “the data scientists to understand the needs of different customers based on the industry they operate in, the state of competition, their current IT infrastructure and their objectives so as to successfully extend the right solution and analytical services.”

Challenges

“Costs, skills and value,” says Taj El-Khayat, Managing Director, Middle East, Turkey, North, West, and Central Africa, Riverbed, aptly summarising the challenges present for the channel when it comes to optimising Big Data solutions.

End customers want to first evaluate the value before they deploy complex and expensive technologies. “This is why a flexible approach always seems to be the right answer in order to allow customers to match their investment curve to the value curve,” explains El-Khayat.

The lack of appropriate skills is a challenge the channel is constantly grappling with. Organisations are yet to realise the need for recruiting specialised personnel to understand the complexities of Big Data; the need of the hour, most channel players say, is for data scientists. “The question that sometimes arises is whether companies implementing Big Data solutions need to hire or outsource such specialists. Depending on the scale of the project either or both options should be considered,” advises El-Khayat.

According to Allen Mitchell, Senior Technical Account Manager, MENA, CommVault Systems, to exploit the current potential requires a mix of old and new skills. Big Data demands new programming and analytics skills that today’s data analysts typically lack, he says. “Most of these skills fall under the heading of ‘data science’. They include a strong background in mathematics and statistical analysis, familiarity with newer statistical programming languages, and a knowledge of analytics modeling techniques.” Adding on, he says, “Big Data also demands a new set of technical skills that aren’t readily found today in many enterprise data centres. Among these ‘hard skills’ are data architecting that includes the build-out of databases that span terabytes of data, being able to administer software frameworks or in analytics programming languages.”

Also, Big Data demands a set of soft skills that includes the ability of people to think broadly across the organisation, Mitchell explains, to understand the bottom-line needs of the business, to know which analytics questions to pose to get to those bottom lines, and to measure and communicate results. “Ultimately, the best resellers differentiate themselves with proven knowledge that yields measurable benefits to their customers,” he adds.

Future prospects

The future for the channel in the Big Data space is bright and hopeful, especially with, data now considered the world’s new natural resource as Banks from GBM puts it. “It will become a key competitive advantage for every industry. Consequently, analytics will play a major role,” he says.

According to Islam Zeidan, Sales and Business Development Director, MEA, Teradata, by investing in the right skillsets, attaining the right certifications and partnering with the right vendors to extend the right Big Data technology portfolios, channel partners can develop a ‘bundle offering’ that combines the best of analytics technologies with the best analytics skills and capabilities. “Not only does this help channel partners create more competitive offering but also



helps them carve a niche to support customers based on their industry, size and objectives from the deployment of Big Data,” he adds.

At the end of the day, the channel stakeholders must actively pursue these opportunities and as is the case with most emerging technologies, those who quickly understand and undertake appropriate strategies will enjoy first-mover advantages.

[Source](#)