

New Program Helps Partner’s Flagship Practice Sustain High Growth

Cisco Services Partner Program helps FlexITy take Managed Services to new level of proactive support.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
<p>FlexITy Solutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology solutions • Richmond Hill, Ontario • 100 employees
<p>BUSINESS CHALLENGE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain high growth rate of company's flagship Managed Services business • Invest in people, processes, and tools to provide repeatable, reliable services to large enterprise and carrier customers
<p>NETWORK SOLUTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cisco Service Partner Program • Cisco Partner Support Service • Smart Services Capabilities
<p>BUSINESS RESULTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Automated discovery of devices helps reconcile customer inventory faster and with greater accuracy • Automated alerts about end-of-life and end-of-support devices help capture revenue • New incentives support goals for continued investment and improvement in services

Business Challenge

Entrepreneurs will tell you that their passion for success runs deep. Peter Stavropoulos, president and chief executive officer of Ontario-based FlexITy Solutions, believes that for a company to be at the forefront of technology, “success has to be in your DNA. If you are going to be a leader in Managed Services, in particular, you have to be willing to jump into new practice areas while your competition is still weighing the risks and advantages.”

It certainly helps if you align yourself with a partner such as Cisco, Stavropoulos says. “I appreciate Cisco’s market foresight. They have helped us understand what customers will want in two or three years, and that has enabled me, as a business owner, to make the right investment decisions.”

A market that Cisco helped FlexITy “capture perfectly,” as Stavropoulos describes it, is unified computing for the data center. The data center practice area continues to be a core offering for FlexITy.

Cisco also helped FlexITy anticipate the need for unified communications (UC) as a managed service. “Before 2008, the transition from data-only networks was referred to as convergence,” says Stavropoulos. “As application stacks started to build, the complexity was hitting companies hard. Working as closely with Cisco as we do, we were able to anticipate and respond to customer pain points faster than a lot of our competitors.” FlexITy’s Hosted Collaboration Solution (HUC) platform, based on Cisco technology, was the first hosted UC service in Canada. In four years, the FlexITy offering has grown into tens of thousands of subscribers, and today it is the only enterprise-grade hosted UC and Collaboration as a Service (UCCaS) service in the country. When FlexITy had the opportunity to transition to the new Cisco Services Partner Program this year, Stavropoulos immediately recognized the potential for his business. “The combination of value-based rewards and access to new smart services will help us continue to meet customer requirements, distinguish ourselves from the competition, and maintain the profit levels to support continued growth.”

Partner Solution

Perhaps the most important growth area is the Managed Services group, which today accounts for one-third of the company’s revenues. Three years ago, Stavropoulos hired Mark Hayward, a 32-year high technology veteran, as

director of Managed Services and IT Development, now the vice president of Operations and IS Deployment. Hayward describes the practice's mission as "providing customer peace of mind."

The group supports primarily large enterprise customers and carriers. One carrier has a nationwide network of 53,000 devices, and FlexITy is responsible for monitoring and managing every device. FlexITy's Network Operations Center is even manned 24 hours a day, so customers are not waiting for engineers to respond to pages in the middle of the night.

Some customers have chosen what Hayward calls its "co-sourcing" option. "Our team has the skills set to serve as the customer's IT organization," he says. "We call it co-sourcing, rather than outsourcing, because we view this as a partnership with our customers, and part of the high touch approach that they value. We have an extremely knowledgeable staff, backed by excellent support from Cisco technical services. Almost half of our technical staff has their Cisco CCIE certifications."

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— Peter Stavropoulos, President and Chief Executive Officer

Hayward feels that a successful managed services model is based on the ability to apply people, processes, and tools to provide repeatable, reliable services. Over the past few years, Hayward says his team has used Cisco services and tools to help them build that level of performance faster than if they had tried to create everything from scratch. "We don't want to just deliver 'best effort' service; we always want to exceed our customer's expectations. With the new smart capabilities available through Partner Support Service, we expect to elevate our services to another level entirely."

The smart services capabilities add automated discovery of devices in the customer's network to help "true up" inventory against service contracts. FlexITy already has an extensive database of devices under support agreements, but the database is awkward and time-consuming to update and search. A lag time can occur before new devices are entered, and some devices that were not purchased through FlexITy may not appear at all. If a question arises about whether a device is covered by a service contract, someone in the group will log into the Cisco database and start searching. "With our larger customers, in particular, this process can be extremely time-consuming because of the sheer volume of devices that customers are adding to their networks all the time," says Hayward. "Whether the device is brand new, whether or not they bought it through us, they still look to FlexITy for support. With this new tool from Cisco, we just push a button for a current picture of the network."

Automated device discovery will also eliminate some of the inherent mistakes associated with manually entering information, such as like serial numbers, into the database. "With just this one new addition to our service capabilities, we will save a lot of the manual work, lag time, and data entry errors," says Hayward.

Business Results

As FlexITy's high-growth practice area, the Managed Services group also needs to generate revenue. In addition to faster and more accurate identification of devices that are not currently under contract, Cisco® smart services capabilities will alert the group to any devices that are end-of-life or end-of-support. "We anticipate that we will be

able to take advantage of more substantial rebates and discounts by capturing renewal opportunities that we may be missing today,” says Hayward. “We have been eagerly waiting for the new partner program. It will be invaluable in helping us continue to sustain the strong growth of Managed Services.

“My team and I have been very impressed with the level of support that we have had from Cisco, the time and the training, in transitioning to the new program. Cisco doesn’t just throw you into the water; they get into the water with you. Their priority is to help us be successful, and that is a real positive for us as a Cisco partner.”

While moving to the new Cisco Services Partner Program, Stavropoulos describes the transition as “seamless. We are continually auditing ourselves and making investments to improve our capabilities, so meeting the requirements for the new program is an extension of how we already operate. We are making the investment because we see the value proposition that Cisco brings. Why would we not invest in greater profitability?”

For more information about the Cisco Service Partner Program, go to:

www.cisco.com/go/cspp

For more information about Partner Support Service, go to:

www.cisco.com/go/collaborativepss

For more information about FlexITy products and services, go to:

www.flexity.ca



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