

ASCII Group Hopes To Heighten Solution Provider Profile At Comdex

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10:00 AM EDT Mon. Sep. 29, 2003

From the September 29, 2003 issue of CRN

Solution providers will have a larger presence at Fall Comdex this year--as exhibitors.

At the Las Vegas show, The ASCII Group plans to man six "innovation centers" with three or four solution providers each. The booths will focus on education, finance, government, health care, manufacturing and distribution solutions that have been built and deployed by the solution providers, said Alan Weinberger, CEO of The ASCII Group, Bethesda, Md.

"For 20 years, Comdex has been about manufacturers and products. We're helping to reorient the show to bring solution providers front and center," Weinberger said. "We're looking to add value to the show and show more fully integrated solutions are the way to go. End users will see the value of a whole solution, not just part of it. The only way to do that is through solution providers and the channel. ASCII is a natural ally to help do that."

ASCII will have the second-largest space on the show floor after Microsoft (NSDQ:[MSFT](#)), Weinberger said.

This marks the first time Comdex has used independent solution providers as consultants on the show floor, said Eric Faurot, vice president and general manager of Comdex.

"ASCII members are out there in the field every day working in health care, government/education. They're building real solutions. We don't want someone doing a PowerPoint on why their product is so great," Faurot said. "There's no such thing as neutral, but solution providers are more neutral than anybody else. They know companies already have invested in certain vendors, hardware and software and want solutions that work within that infrastructure."

ASCII solution providers must apply to be selected as an exhibitor, he said. Candidates must have references in the vertical solutions and have been in business for at least five years.

"I think it's a great idea. It's never been tried. I'll give them 100 points for pulling this off. If I were a reseller specializing in a certain area and had this opportunity, I'd be jumping at it," said Joe Balsarotti, president of Software to Go, a Clayton, Mo.-based ASCII member. "The exposure for those slots, that could make or break these's people's livelihoods. It's the most proactive thing I've ever seen any organization do for their members."

The solution providers will showcase on-demand, Linux, security, Web services, wireless and digital enterprise solutions in the vertical areas, Weinberger said.

"We'll also have a hands-on lab area to meet the VARs and demo the solutions, and a theatre for case studies and presentations," he said.

Comdex attendance has lagged in recent years, and its owner, MediaLive International, previously known as Key3Media, went through bankruptcy protection and received a cash infusion this summer from Thomas Weisel Capital Partners.

The result is that this year's Comdex will be focused only on business-to-business, Faurot said.

"Comdex has a great 23-year history, but this is Year 1 of the new Comdex. We've eliminated the consumer-facing and non-IT exhibitors. There are no more massage chairs. Comdex has been designed to highlight the business value of the technology, not gadgetry for gadgetry's sake," he said.