

# At The Heart Of The Organizing Principle

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**A** few years ago, I was researching an article on how VARs sell projectors to small businesses and, to better understand the process, filled out a form on the Web sites of two leading vendors, indicating that I wanted to speak to a reseller. Weeks went by, and then months. A year and a half later, I got a call from a VAR representing vendor No. 1, followed later by a VAR associated with vendor No. 2.

So much for hot leads. As many solution providers have learned over the years, unless they're large enough to engage with a vendor's field sales force, so-called lead-generation programs are rarely worth the effort. And these days, the small-business VAR is better off leading with services and engaging new clients with something more than a bingo card in hand.

But it brings home a perennial complaint. Small-business solution providers often find themselves at the low end of the totem pole when it comes to vendor support. As Bob Lamb, CEO of ESI Technologies, Athens, Tenn., put it: "Most channel programs for the SMB space are dumbed-down versions of their enterprise version--just their enterprise version lite."

Realistically, vendors lack the resources to engage with thousands of solution providers. There is an alternative, though. Solution providers can get more attention by joining organizations such as TechSelect, VentureTech and The ASCII Group. As our lead story reports, solution providers are increasingly doing just that--and discovering that vendors are responsive.

Solution providers are finding the real value in these organizations comes not so much from increased vendor attention, though. At the heart of the matter is the interaction with their peers, particularly through service networks. While solution provider organizations have been around for years, their role is changing to reflect the shift toward solutions selling. But the principle remains the same: There is strength in numbers