

Channel Globe-Trotters

Solution providers taking on multinational projects face many of the same challenges -- and new ones

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In January, Angela Trillhaase found herself in the shoes of a foreign exchange student.

That's when the senior vice president of business development for Meridian IT began tackling one of her biggest career challenges to date, figuring out how her Chicago-based regional integration firm could handle a 14-country rollout for a longtime U.S. customer—without actually having a physical presence in nine of those countries.

Developing Meridian IT's multinational presence became part of Trillhaase's job description late last year, after its most recent acquisition, when the executive team realized its country-centric approach was leaving money on the table. What's more, a growing number of Meridian IT's clients—not just big enterprises—need the solution provider to handle multicountry deployments.

Trillhaase believes that about 10 percent of her company's clients, so far, have requested international capabilities and that number is on the rise.

"Our customers are the ones that are driving this requirement," she said. "It's not that we thought it was fun or sexy or cool."

Meridian IT is, perhaps, unique in that it does have offices in several countries outside the United States, including Australia, Germany and the United Kingdom. But lest you think smaller solution providers are immune, consider the case of Powersolution.com, which generates around \$1 million in annual revenue, and is dealing with a major project involving multiple locations in Asia.

Powersolution.com originally was called in to a consult on a data security issue for a New York-based aerospace company, Argosys International, and found itself charged with rebuilding the company's corporate network, which has locations in South Korea, Taiwan, several cities in China, and soon-to-come India. The four- to six-month project includes a [database](#) migration, deployment of a new security [infrastructure](#) and a [server](#) consolidation that involves [virtualization](#) work.

"There are many interesting turns in this project, for example the 12-hour time difference—during the D-Day switchover week, we worked six consecutive 24-hour days via shifts starting at 3:00 a.m. on a Friday and completing phase one at 4:00 a.m. Thursday," said Powersolution.com

CEO David Dadian. "We slept at the New York location over the weekend. This was required so that the company could [function](#) and run on Friday in the U.S. and Monday in Asia [our Sunday]."

Language was not as much of an issue, as the company had translators and the engineers quickly learned some common syntax to aid in support. A bigger problem was the fact that Powersolution.com underestimated the amount of resources the project would consume, Dadian said.

The need to share information about best practices and points of regional differentiation around the globe was just one dynamic behind the ASCII Group's decision to become a founding member of the International Technology Channels Association (ITCA), said Alan Weinberger, chairman and CEO of the [ASCII](#) Group, Bethesda, Md.

Weinberger said ASCII is increasingly having discussions with vendors looking to affiliate with a group that can help them forge transnational contracts.

Contract structures are probably one of the thorniest issues for solution providers trying to take their business across borders.

In the case of Meridian IT, the company holds an advanced partner designation in the United States but doesn't hold the same status in the other countries where it actually has offices. That means its discounts aren't the same, depending on where the product is being shipped, Trillhaase said.