

Comdex Pays Off For ASCII Members

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For a few days, Danny Boice felt "larger than life."

As principal partner with The Jaxara Group, a \$1 million software developer and solution provider in Washington, D.C., Boice was one of 20 solution providers and ASCII members that set up shop on the show floor at Comdex Las Vegas 2003. For the first time in the show's 23-year history, event organizers dedicated space to solution providers, a move that paid off with new prospects, an exchange of important information and an added relevance to a show that many believe needs a jolt of life.

Shortly after giving a presentation on the power of open-source software in the education market, Boice was visited by members of the State Department and U.S. Department of Education who wanted to know more about using his services for upcoming jobs. A handful of other attendees also flocked to his small booth at the Linux/Open Source Innovation Center in the Las Vegas Convention Center to download Jaxara's white papers and marketing information.

"So far we've had about 20 warm leads, and I'm expecting a lot of business to come out of that. We are larger than life, at least while we're here," Boice said Tuesday from the show floor. "I never would have had the chance to talk to them if I wasn't here being supported by The ASCII Group. As solution providers, we can go it alone and pick away at certain markets, but when you get a bunch of solution providers together driving home the value of the channel, big things can happen."

Alan Weinberger, CEO of the ASCII Group, Bethesda, Md., had that in mind when he agreed to bring the group to Comdex. Since the trade show organizer, MediaLive, is billing this as the first year of the new Comdex, Weinberger hopes the solution provider presence will become a regular feature at future shows.

"We hope to be a key partner with Comdex in reinventing the trade show," Weinberger said. "Through our continued participation we hope to put solution providers front and center. A lot of this is about showing the flag."

That flag symbolizes the importance of solutions in today's increasingly complex IT mix. Although there were about 50 percent fewer vendors on the show floor than last year, there were plenty of new and innovative products. But the majority of them couldn't work without being tied to a full solution. That's why a strong solution provider presence at the show is so sorely needed, attendees said.

"People here are interested in solutions like Web services, but not until they try to do it themselves the first time do they realize they need what we offer," said Al Goerner, a principal at Valtech, a solution provider based in Raleigh, N.C., that consults customers on Web services implementation. "We have the scars, so we have a lot to share."

Goerner and Brad Murphy, Valtech's senior vice president of strategic business development, are ASCII members and were manning a booth in the Web Services Innovation Center. The two picked up several good leads from attendees who heard their presentations and realized they needed help in maximizing Web services initiatives.

"The best thing about ASCII bringing us here is that attendees can meet with us and learn more about effective solutions than they can in a random walk-by of a more general booth," Murphy said. "This really helps the community of fellow [end-user] sufferers."

A few booths away, ASCII member Jeff Sherman, CEO of Warever Computing, a small full-range solution provider based in Los Angeles, was getting ready to give his second presentation on document management and HIPAA compliance. Judging by the quality of questions he received, Sherman concluded that many Comdex attendees actually care about solutions. He was even more surprised when a representative from Pfizer pharmaceuticals inquired about the possibility of working with his company.

"That's one customer I would not have been able to meet if I wasn't here," Sherman said. "Comdex might be getting smaller, but I think it's becoming more relevant."