

When It Comes To Google, Distributors Lose Their Voice

By Scott Campbell & Jennifer Lawinski



5:00 PM EST Fri. Feb. 23, 2007
Are distributors afraid of Google?

CRN asked five distributors for their reaction to the [software](#) company's new [Google](#) Apps Premier Edition offering, and only one executive chose to respond.

Spokespersons from Tech Data, SED International and Synnex said their respective companies would have no comment regarding Google's plans, while executives from Ingram Micro didn't respond Thursday or Friday.

Dan Schwab, vice president of marketing at D&H Distributing, said he hasn't been briefed on Google Apps, but said the [search](#) giant is missing the boat if it doesn't include a play for solution providers.

"The channel delivers solutions to small business. Bypassing the channel clearly limits any company's ability for success," Schwab said.

There aren't many topics that clam up every distributor, but count Google among them. Maybe they're quiet because Google Apps sales will be direct, and a channel strategy isn't developed. Or maybe they're reluctant to discuss secret, ongoing negotiations with Google, considering it's one of the most-anticipated recent software launches for the [SMB](#) market.

Whatever the case, at least one solution provider wants distributors to speak up to espouse the value of the channel to Google or anyone else that will listen.

"It sounds like [distributors] are going to bury their heads in the sand and hope it goes away," said Jay Tipton, vice president of Technology Specialists, Fort Wayne, Ind. "It's like when HP was going direct. [Distributors] didn't have a whole to say when that happened, either."

The frustrating part, Tipton said, is that he would have liked to see how distributors evaluated the product set. "I'm not going to go out and spend money renting or buying an app to support it. I've got better things to do with my time," he said.

Tipton added that he's not sure what impact Google will have in the commercial space.

"I haven't had any customers inquire about it. I can see where home users will use it more than businesses. A lot of our clients are driven off their vertical app. I don't know if [Google] will go out and try to get some vertical apps to use [its suite]," he said.

Although Google didn't detail any role for traditional resellers in its launch this week, Rajen Sheth, product manager for Google Enterprise, indicated that there may be good opportunities for VARs and integrators to tie the Google apps into corporate directories and other infrastructure.

For \$50 per person, per year, Google Apps Premier Edition gives a business Google "Docs & Spreadsheets" plus GoogleTalk instant messaging/VoIP, Gmail, Google Calendar, and [Web page](#) creation tools. Each user also gets 10 gigabytes of storage, a fivefold increase over the free, ad-supported version.

One channel angle for Google might come through The [ASCII](#) Group, according to Alan Weinberger, chairman and CEO of the channel organization, which has 2,000 solution provider members.

ASCII is working with Google on the Google Co-Op [platform](#) and is creating customizable search engines. For example, ASCII helps users who Google "gigabit switch" to refine their search to SMB, enterprise, medical and other categories, he explained.

ASCII hopes to leverage that relationship into services on the Google Apps side, Weinberger added. "[Google] doesn't see the distributors as the model, but they want to have the VARs have some play in it," he said.

Weinberger is unsure whether solution providers would resell Google Apps or be involved on the services side.

"We're just trying to make them more visible at this point. Let [end users] know that Google is around as an alternative," he said. "Everything Google does is a work in progress."