

Found In Translation: Great Insights From Eastern Europe

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11:41 AM EDT Fri. Mar. 30, 2007

It's hard to report on an event you didn't actually attend, but I heard such great things about the CMP Channel Group's inaugural XChange Eastern Europe event that I begged some phone numbers and brushed up on my international dialing skills.

Here's what I discovered: Just like their U.S. counterparts, solution providers from Eastern Europe are eager to share.

"You have to be very, very flexible. You have to be adaptive to new ideas. It doesn't matter if the idea comes from the United States or Sri Lanka," said Umesh Wadhwa, president of eDirect, a 7-year-old, 19-employee solution provider from Warsaw, Poland, that originally had ties to an organization in the United Kingdom.

For Wadhwa, XChange Eastern Europe in Budapest, Hungary, offered a chance to have a more direct dialogue with existing vendor partners including IBM (NYSE:[IBM](#)), for which eDirect holds an advanced partner designation.

"You could actually talk to a person and tell them about your pains straight away, not have to go through to another [in-country] person," he said.

During the event, Wadhwa was also able to meet with other partners from Poland, as well as countries like Hungary and Slovakia.

Laura Voglino, vice president of sales and distribution, global solutions and channel marketing for IBM, and personally based in Raleigh, N.C., attended the event to get a better understanding of the growth dynamics associated with business partners from regions like Russia.

"You hear the statistics and now the growth in these areas, but having a live example validates this," she said, pointing to the example of a systems integrator in Russia who had exploded from 18 to 800 people over a short time-span.

She also was studying regions where work from the United States is likely to shift. "You have seen India and how the labor costs have been leveraged to do business in other places. The same is going to happen with Russia," Voglino said.

Nick Tidd, vice president of global channel sales for 3Com (NSDQ:[COMS](#)), who resides in Toronto, Canada, when he's not off visiting solution providers, was on a similar scouting expedition. One thing he is considering as he builds the company's worldwide program: Although the networking channel across Eastern Europe has yet to develop a standard set of

business practices like in North America, the deployment of high speed Internet access on a per-capita basis in this region is ahead of the United States.

"We have to have a program that is scalable to the geography and that accounts for nuances such as this," Tidd said.

He added: "It's a footrace to deploy hardware there right now. It's almost like the U.S. was in the late 1990s."

Which, actually, was another common refrain among the people I interview: the need to share ideas.

For Level Platforms, the experience encouraged the company to hire a person solely dedicated to international channel and business development. "What we took away from this event was information that helped us drive forward and look at the market," said Carlson Colomb, director of business development for the Ottawa, Ontario-based MSP platform company.

Although it's tough to find smaller U.S. solution providers that are trying to expand abroad, they increasingly recognize the need to share information about best practices and points of regional differentiation. That was just one dynamic behind the ASCII Group's decision to become a founding member of the [International Technology Channels Association](#).

"For me personally, it's not a big deal one way or the other. But for ASCII as a whole, it's an important move forward to become an international community as opposed to just a U.S. community," said John Kunzer, president/owner of MCC Technology, an ASCII member in St. Charles, Ill. "The world is getting flatter and this is another sign of that happening."

As is tradition at XChange events in the United States, the solution providers in Budapest were asked to vote on a series of XChange Xcellence awards based on their meetings with and keynotes by the sponsoring vendors. Following are the awards conferred during the event: Best Partner Program, IBM; Best XChange Appointment Presentation, 3Com; Innovative Technology Award, Advanced Micro Devices; Best World Premiere Presentation, AMD; Best Hardware Solution, IBM; Best Software Solution, Zeus; Best Revenue Generator, AMD; and Overall Best of Show, IBM.