



## Expecting More From Your IT Solution Provider

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It often seems to end user customers that vendors are everywhere. There are so many different companies attempting to sell the same kinds of products and services. The vendor selection process can vary from easy, to somewhat challenging, or to quite difficult.

On the easy end of the buying effort spectrum lays the purchase of truly commoditized items. Truly commoditized product is virtually impossible to misconfigure, is readily available, and assured to arrive in good condition. Do all personal computers and larger servers fall into this category? Not at all. There are so many options and vendor pre-load procedures that tie to purchaser software criteria. Aligning with a vendor that will take the time to thoroughly explain the options and provide a host of aspects in service might make sense for some buyers; not all suppliers selling the same lines are willing to enter into a detailed dialogue about requirements...or to significantly tailor the buying and delivery experience.

Certainly, for a large rollout of the same type of product to hundreds of locations, despite the configuration complexity of a robust set of specifications, a buyer can opt for a proof of concept or pilot. Once the pilot is validated or successful, the buyer can ask for a cookie cutter rollout of the given specified configuration. Vendors with the inventory or good factory connections, the skills to load software and test systems prior to shipping, and with project management skills lead the competition when many only offer product without, however, meaningful services.

### What is a "Vendor?"

Webster's Dictionary lists this primary definition:

*"a person or agency that sells"*

In researching Webster's Dictionary for the definition of "vendor," I attempted to find "strategic alliance partner." Since my search was that of a phrase and not of a word, the search failed to deliver. What is my point? As the President of Datatrend Technologies, when a valued customer refers to my firm as a "vendor," it tells me that I have been pigeon holed. While the Datatrend organization is extremely appreciative of gaining new customers or becoming a vendor for one of our clients, when categorized as a "vendor," it means someone views us as a source for product. Don't get me wrong; at Datatrend, we are thrilled to supply products in qualified situations.

However, if Datatrend is being the best it can be for its customers, our clients will view us as a source for information, counseling, solutions, and leadership. Not just product.

When we can invest in our clients and better understand their business as well as their direction/goals and pending initiatives, we can save the client's time and money in developing a multi-dimensional solution. When clients allow a competent solutions company the opportunity to serve as a "partner," the end result will often be superior to that of the "vendor" variety. At Datatrend, we try to not only supply product at competitive prices but also to solve problems, model solutions, and align with clients where we play a significant role in helping reach a milestone or goal.

Even in the context of not designing a solution but just selling product, we strive to differentiate from competition in testing the products or packaging prior to shipment, providing insight into delivery options, tracking freight, and reporting delivery status. Whereas this example would be classified more as a vendor than as a strategic alliance partner, we continue to offer site planning information that includes environmental, dimensional, electrical, and weight information.

### Becoming More Than a Vendor

Clients that select and refer to Datatrend as a vendor are appreciated at the highest level, but get more than typical vendor treatment. Clients that view Datatrend as a strategic alliance partner, get an extension to their IT team, an extension to their



business development team, and a partner willing to invest back into the relationship with the sponsoring of user groups, solutions seminars, and tailored account advocacy efforts. Datatrend likes to find a customer based business initiative sponsor that will articulate objectives. Datatrend will work with the sponsor and the pertinent people to review current infrastructure, corporate standards, and applications. We will deliver suggestions, model solutions, and propose implementation services that hit the mark of the objectives.

So if you like me and know how sensitive I can be, please refer to Datatrend as either a super vendor or your strategic alliance partner, it will not only warm my heart, but will energize your Datatrend team to provide the challenge to improve our services further. On the other hand, if Datatrend is deserving only of the "vendor" reference, in your way of thinking and experience, please have compassion and drop me a personal note or call me so that I can be aware of the room for improvement which we must undertake together. Vendors are everywhere and customers do not grow on trees. We want the honor and privilege of having the opportunity to serve you in any capacity, but especially that of a true partner...a strategic alliance partner.

## Customer of the Quarter



In this month's newsletter, we have delivered a new feature, "Customer of the Quarter." Marriott International is being featured this month. Datatrend has had the privilege of serving Marriott for over 15 years. Thanks to all within the Marriott organization for placing your faith in your partner, Datatrend Technologies.

At Datatrend, we attempt to patronize our client partners as much as possible. When traveling, we often stay at a Marriott brand hotel. Personally, I spend one-third of my time living out of hotels and suitcases. Comfort is important. One can rely on certain things to always be in place at a Marriott: cleanliness, good food, the best beds and pillows, an attentive staff, clear television, and a variety of amenities commensurate with the brand. Many Marriott properties have in-room, high-speed Internet access--this can be the difference in hitting the hay at 9:00 or after midnight. Full service Marriott properties have award-winning catering, meeting facilities, an audio visual equipment inventory, fabulous concierge service, fine dining, exercise room, a pool, and much more.

Marriott has more brands than any other hospitality enterprise. Through the years, Marriott has not been "just a hotel;" rather, they have reached out for client feedback to improve a tier of brands from economy accommodations to world class resorts. While other hotels can be quite competitive and enjoyable, one of my favorite aspects of patronizing Marriott is that you can rely on the details being in line and the quality superior.

Marriott truly partners with its patrons in soliciting suggestions. The chain continues to improve each and every year as a result. Marriott leverages technology significantly in the quest to better serve. The Marriott.com site is an extremely user friendly website where one can search all of the brand class options in a locality, check hotel amenities and rates, and book online conveniently and quickly. Reservation confirmations and details are emailed back to the patron virtually instantly.



## Conclusion

In this on demand world, there is little room left for pretenders. We all have to be the best we can be and seek out relationships with people and organizations that demand the best. Communication is the key element. Speaking up is important. Tell your partners what you want in service, and they will deliver on demand. Please let me know how Datatrend can better serve you by contacting me at [mark.waldrep@datatrend.com](mailto:mark.waldrep@datatrend.com) or 1-800-367-7472. Nothing is more pleasing to me than speaking with customers about their business requirements.