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BY LAWRENCE M. WALSH

OLSolutions Shines In Support Of Small VARs

Tracey Lingle doesn't let limited resources or his diminutive company get in the way of business. The JJC Group, a VAR based in Romeoville, Ill., has only three employees—including Lingle, who's the sales manager—yet it generates nearly \$3 million a year in revenue. If the customer wants something, Lingle will find a way to deliver it.

"I don't want my business limited by the four walls of my office," Lingle says. "I want my clients to come to me for whatever they need."

That's one reason why JJC works with OLSolutions, a small value-added software distributor in Huntington Beach, Calif. OLSolutions, formerly known as Optical Laser provides software engineers and salespeople that act as force multipliers for solution providers and provide access to products that would otherwise require significant investment in training and certification.

"I don't have the expertise, but OLSolutions has the people who can help me sell," Lingle says.

While all distributors offer technical, training and marketing support, OLSolutions is making field support the hallmark of its business.

"What we're providing is especially important for small and midsize VARs," says Arsenio Batoy, OLSolutions president. "They're being asked for these solutions, but they don't have the access, resources and support they need."

The cornerstone of OLSolutions unique positioning is its relationship with EMC's software division. EMC lets uncertified solution providers leverage OLSolutions staff expertise to resell and deploy products. That arrangement gives smaller, resource-constrained solution providers access to market-leading software.

"I don't have the bandwidth to send my engineer to do all the certification," says Jeff Rogers, president of Steelhead Data in Sacramento, Calif. "OLSolutions offers professional services at a reasonable price, and they can deliver the field support we need."

But OLSolutions isn't a newcomer to the distribution game. Founded in 1988, the onetime broad-

line distributor carried a variety of hardware and software products. In the mid-1990s, its revenue topped \$50 million—more than 2.5 times what it is today. But the company fell victim to the dot-com bust and an inability to compete with the large "warehouse and ship" distributors.

Over the past several years, OLSolutions has fine-tuned its business, now focusing strictly on software, with an emphasis on niche and emerging application vendors. It carries instant-messaging security applications from Akonix; document and storage management from MDI, Plasmon and Qualstar; and scanner applications and maintenance agreements for Fujitsu and Kodak. Focusing on specialties gives the disty a greater ability to provide expert support in key areas rather than diluted support across a broad product portfolio, Batoy says.

OLSolutions solution providers say that kind of support is invaluable. Lingle recounts how an OLSolutions sales engineer helped him win more business. During a software deployment, the engi-

neer made several observations about the IT infrastructure of a JJC customer and gave the VAR a list of recommendations that eventually led to sales.

Other distributors, including Avnet, Ingram Micro and Synnex, are taking a page from the OLSolutions playbook and enhancing their field support for solution providers, but VARs say these distributors are too big to truly understand



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—Arsenio Batoy, OLSolutions

their small businesses or deliver the same level of support that OLSolutions does.

"I wanted to stay in the niche market," Rogers says. "OLSolutions fits us better than other folks."

Batoy doesn't denigrate his larger competitors' offerings. He says the big disties are great at managing programs and building communities, such as Ingram Micro's VentureTech Network. But that's not the same as putting feet on the street.

"They're more of a concierge than an in-house service provider," Batoy says.

He and his management team realize that their prosperity is due largely to being small and nimble, able to support small solution providers and empathize with their business needs and goals.

"We're acting like a small community bank," Batoy says. "We're like a Trader Joe's vs. a Wal-Mart. As long as we stay small, there's plenty of room to grow." ■