

## EVENT FLASH

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### SMB Summit 2008

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#### IN THIS EVENT FLASH

This IDC Flash reviews the recent SMB Summit 2008, which was held April 18–21 in Dallas, Texas.

#### SITUATION OVERVIEW

The fourth annual SMB Summit brought over 300 partners together from around the country to network, build technical and business skills, and share best practices in an atmosphere of community and cooperation. While the event was organized and produced by partner organizations SMB Technology Network (SMBTN) and Heartland Tech Groups (HTG), vendor sponsors were an important component of the program. Sponsors included Microsoft, SonicWALL, D&H, HP, Trend Micro, Zenith, Response Point, and Autotask. Highlights of the event included:

- ☒ **Training.** The conference provided attendees specific technical training on a variety of Microsoft products, including the upcoming Small Business Server (SBS) 2008 and Essential Business Server (EBS) 2008. Additionally, the program offered sessions focusing on best business practices ranging from potential marketing initiatives to selection, screening, and compensation strategies for employees.
- ☒ **Community.** While channel partners could view one another as competitors, the partners attending the SMB Summit acted more like a community than business rivals. Many of the conference presenters were partners who had already built a successful business and wanted to share their experience with others. One of the stated goals of the event was to introduce partners to peer groups and to provide mentoring as a vehicle to grow their business.
- ☒ **Vendors.** Despite the fact that the conference was created and produced by partners, vendors still played an important role at the event. Vendor sponsors were able to increase brand awareness among SMB partners and gain important insights as to what partners are seeing in the field. Meanwhile, partners were able to build relationships with vendors and consider adding new products and technologies to their portfolios.

On the whole, the conference was very informative and the vast majority of partners felt it was beneficial to their business. This is an important fact as partners not only had to pay to attend but were away from their business for three to four days. Many attendees came from very small companies with 1–5 employees, so leaving for that amount of time was not necessarily easy. Given the natural competition among channel partners, regardless of the increased trend in them working together, it was most surprising to witness the positive interaction between partners. People genuinely seemed to open up and share both positive and negative experiences in the hopes of helping others. While most of these attendees would consider the others to be competitors, there was a true collegiate feeling about the events where synergies were found. It quickly became clear that the partners sincerely wanted to help one another because of their mutual professional respect and feelings of camaraderie. The level of cooperation was somewhat unexpected. While IDC has seen partner collaboration before, it has not typically been on a scale such as what occurred at SMB Summit.

#### FUTURE OUTLOOK

IDC has been following the emergence of partner-to-partner networks for some time and believes the trend continues to grow. There are numerous benefits to partners engaging in partner communities, but there can be benefits for vendors as well. While many vendors maintain their own partner-to-partner networks, vendors can still see value at independent events such as the SMB Summit. Overall, most partners appeared impressed with the vendors' messages at the SMB Summit, and the nature of the event forced vendors to tailor their focus specifically to small partners selling into the SMB.

It is clear that vendors are going to have to continue to support these types of events — they may in fact have to retool some resources if these types of events become more pervasive. While many of the partners attending the event were small, taken as one, small partners selling into the SMB constitute a powerful force. By building a community instead of a group of competitors, SMB partners can come closer to speaking with one voice and gain leverage in the market.

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