



Cisco Announces Unified Computing — Creates Its Own Partner Ecosystem

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Comment by [Janet Waxman](#)

John Grady contributed to this link.

On March 16th, Cisco announced the [Unified Computing System](#). From a channels perspective, this was not only about technology, it raised the bar on the partner ecosystem. The evolution of partner communities is something that has been growing for many years, sometimes under the radar screen; two with more visibility are Ingram Micro's Venture Tech Network and Tech Data's Tech Select program. The [Cisco announcement](#), which included technology from a variety of partners, not only introduced a new technology to customers but also created the absolute necessity for a true partner ecosystem, which will be required for the success of this product. While the Unified Computing System itself is initially a largely direct play for now, the services and implementation component is incredibly important as the new system will tie together networking, storage, virtualization and datacenter components. Cisco has recognized this by creating an Authorized Technology Provider (ATP) Program for Unified Computing.

Initially this [ecosystem](#) will be composed largely of the supplier community, with a few select go-to-market partners, specifically those that are focused on the very high end of the market. The roster will likely grow in the short term to ensure that customer demand can be met. Cisco is driving this effort and is going to work with select Data Center Specialized partners. The company is also planning to "develop a channel program that will enable and accelerate the sales of the Unified Computing product that will include technology from the technology partners, bringing together the hardware and infrastructure software components, that are included in this announcement. Each of these alliance partners also works with indirect partners, and IDC has known for a long time that these two groups are often the same partners, or have worked collaboratively for many years. To that end, some of the Cisco partners are also skilled and certified to sell and service other supplier partners' technology in this network, but IDC would argue that the number of partners that are skilled in all of these technologies, outside of potentially the largest system integrators, lays the foundation for the next-generation partner ecosystem. The question is, will Cisco be able to pull these partners together. In practice, IDC believes that Cisco, which is a very efficient company, has the capability and capacity to do this. The question is, how much demand will be in the market that will drive partners towards this solution. Assuming that the market demand grows, it will be incumbent on Cisco to align at the next level with its supplier partners to create a true partner-to-partner network that incorporates the partner communities of the suppliers.

If Cisco is able to do this, it may in fact build the largest cross-supplier partner network in the market. Many suppliers do have large partner ecosystems, but few if any have been able to pull together this breadth of partners that allows the partners to complement each other to deliver a true solution. This announcement is a system but a platform for enormous partner growth through advanced collaboration.

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