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**The Importance of Third
Party Relationships**



From the beginning, the ODTVision VRU development strategy and marketing approach has been enhanced through third party relationships. Keep in mind, what makes the ODTVision VRU solution so unique is its ability to be

customized around the client's needs.

Over a decade ago I was at an IBM Business Partner meeting in which I made the statement, "Marketing drives development." Attendees at this conference seemed startled by my statement so I continued, "Development doesn't happen in a vacuum,....it is driven by the needs of the current and future clients as well as the features they request. In addition, marketing is always looking at what the competition is offering and development needs to kind of keep up with the Joneses. Maintaining a current solution will then help your marketing efforts. Finally, development needs to keep the product current with operating system releases and updates of various products used within the ODTVision product."

Third party relationships give us a competitive edge as they introduce our solution to a broad range of clients without the marketing cost associated to reach these new clients. The ODTVision VRU allows the user to create their IVR telephony

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applications and also to have the ability to do enhancements and changes to that application in the future. It is basically a customizable interface that can be tailored to the needs of the client, the nature of their environment and the



systems which it is interfaced to. Most of our third party relationships are with software houses or consultants that work in the IBM Midrange Marketplace. These types of relationships have been there from day one, and new ones are always encouraged.



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Relationship with IBM

Our relationship with IBM dates back to when I was President of the Central Ohio IBM Mid-range User's group and most of our monthly dinner meeting speakers were from IBM. In the late 80's as the co-director and creator of a five state regional IBM Midrange conference that was held yearly at the Columbus Convention Center, I still depended largely on speakers from IBM. In fact, in 1988 when the local Columbus IBM office was preparing to introduce the "Silver Lake System" that was the AS400, that office asked for my database of known IBM midrange system users to use for this event as my list was more extensive than theirs.

Over the years, my firm was approached on many different occasions to become a full fledged IBM business partner but that has some concerns for us. You see, we have always done unique communication and I/O type of interfaces. Many of our third party relationships on different projects were with other IBM Business Partners or even IBM representatives themselves that had to bring us in early on the project planning phase. These firms and individuals would be reluctant to do that if they saw us as a competitor. I may be dating myself but I remember one large dial up network where the users had Macintosh computers dialing into an AS400 with Hayes modems. We were supplying just one small part, the protocol convertors that allowed the connection and translation between the Macintosh and the AS400. I remember the IBM representative asking, "Why are these guys here?" Answer,..... we are making this project possible with our one small part.

Then a number of years ago, IBM came out with a new type of Business Partner. The ISV (Independent Software Vendor) still is

considered an IBM Business Partner but we don't sell IBM Products. An IBM representative or Business Partner doesn't see us as competition. This program requires that we provide a solution that works within the IBM family of products. We had to go through the vetting process where our solutions are accredited and our firm is reviewed to become part of this program. We also had to provide client references so IBM could review the way we did business as well as conduct live interviews. Once accepted, we became an ISV which has many benefits including our own web page on IBM.com.

Being an IBM ISV also assist us with leads coming in from IBM as well as more gravitas with other IBM Business Partners or potential clients.

Relationship with Other Third Party Firms

From the very beginning, consultants, software houses and IBM business partners brought our solution in to various projects.



Since we do not define our work to any one particular vertical or type of company, this third party firm gives us their experience in what the project needs to accomplish. On many occasions this third party company already had a relationship with the client so there wasn't that normal introduction phase and that firm would say, "this is the firm and product that will provide this piece of our puzzle." We could immediately move from "Who are you? to What Needs to be done?."



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Vision Voice Vantage, Inc.
1938 Zollinger Road
Columbus, Ohio 43221

Phone: 888-252-2555
Email sales@ODTVision.com



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Not All Wine and Roses



Any relationship takes work. It begins with knowing who you are dealing with and what is expected. I love working with true IBM Business Partners as I know those firms have already been vetted and there is a quality and method by which they perform business. That is not to say that we haven't had wonderful relationships and great projects with non-IBM Business Partners but you have to spend time getting to know each firm and how they do business. It is also important to know the client and what they expect of the project. We always begin with a good game plan and good communications including who is responsible for what and what major functions are needed from the application. It is also important to outline target dates and all related goals to be accomplished. Before going live, there must be time for testing and we develop contingency plans to deal with unexpected issues.

Always Looking For New Relationships

Back in 2005 when we won the product of the year from the think-tank group "Search400.com, the editor told me that when they first looked at our solution, they didn't just see an VRU but a product that made so many things possible. It does so many different things. Think of the ODTVision VRU

as a chameleon able to do what needs to be done in any environment. **If your firm sells a municipal court system and your customer wants to provide 24/7 customer service and reduce costs the ODTVision may be the hook that enables your firm to make that sale.** In these tough economic times, a self-service IVR application may sell that new system or software package. It may stimulate business for that software house or consultant.

We also love associated sales. Whenever we finish a project an obvious question we ask is, "Are you using a software package and do you know who else is using this package?" Once customization around an unique application is done, if you have other branches needing our product or there are other firms on the same system, it is almost a cookie cutter approach to do that same application on a different system because so much of the base work has been done. Most of the time, this is accomplished with little or no modification.

We offer finder's fees for third party relationships and have a VAR program as well. Please feel free to contact us to see if you qualify for either. Bottom line, we love new business and 3rd party relationships provide value to our customers and can create new revenue opportunities for both companies involved. All inquiries are welcome. ■

