SAP App Center and Sodales: A Platform for Partner Growth and Customer Success

*The third in a series of EAC Focus Reports on how SAP App Center is enabling customer and partner success.*

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Many software vendors start out as service providers, building custom software for their customers on a one-off basis. When it becomes obvious that a particular custom application could be applicable to a number of other customers, the opportunity to build repeatable, packaged solutions can be the stepping off point to a new line of business. That opportunity, however, often requires a different technology focus and go-to-market strategy in order to make the investment successful. In order to justify that investment it becomes necessary to find a way to open up new markets and find a broader base of prospective customers than was possible as a pure services company.

This was the case with Sodales Solutions Inc., a Toronto-based provider of software for regulatory compliance, labor relations, and employee health and safety. The company, already successful as a consulting services company, realized that selling packaged solutions would not only drive new sources of revenue but also enable the company to stand out in a crowded market and create a more predictable revenue stream. “We were originally focused as a service company and were looking to differentiate ourselves and quickly scale our business,” Sana Salam, the president and founder of Sodales, told EAC. That consulting work led Salam to realize that there were “problems that Sodales could solve” in the public and utility sectors that lent themselves to a more repeatable, packaged software approach.

Salam recognized that in order to be as successful as a product company, Sodales needed to find a way to scale its sales and marketing quickly, and that meant finding an ecosystem that provided both a broad
set of prospective customers as well as a technology platform that lent itself to the kind of software development Salam had in mind. The search quickly led Sodales to the SAP ecosystem and, in particular, SAP App Center. The ability to launch on a commercial partner site while basing its offering on SAP HANA and the SAP Cloud Platform were an important draw for Sodales’ new business development efforts. The combination of technology platform and access to a large pre-existing customer base “could allow us to quickly innovate,” Salam said.

The company was able to rapidly develop a prototype of its first product, which Sodales launched on SAP App Center within six months. Within a few years, in 2018, Sodales’ success as an SAP partner led it to be a recipient of an SAP Pinnacle Award for partner excellence, an award Sodales won again in 2019 as the SAP App Center partner of the year.

For Salam, SAP App Center was an essential part of her company’s strategic shift to becoming a product company. The ability to showcase innovative products and make them accessible to line of business decision makers on SAP App Center was particularly appealing to a company focused on solving specific business problems that were not being addressed by major software vendors. The fact that SAP App Center is designed to allow business users to find, pilot, and buy new, innovative software fit Sodales’ business model perfectly.

“The [SAP] App Center becomes a great platform for [potential customers] to come in and search and see things before they make the first contact,” Salam explained. The fact that SAP App Center is available to a worldwide audience of companies that are already using SAP technology and are looking for products that can work alongside their SAP infrastructure gave Sodales an important head start in its new software line of business. The worldwide user base that the [SAP] App Center can tap into “allows us to reach markets that we couldn’t otherwise reach,” Salam added.

Driving Customer Success

That extended reach brought Sodales to the attention of Puget Sound Energy, which was looking for software that would help support the company’s labor relations processes. “Most of our processes were a combination of software and manual systems, including spreadsheets,” said Chaim Nel, senior SAP project manager at Puget Sound Energy, an energy provider headquartered in Bellevue, WA. “The lack of connectivity to the rest of the utility’s human resources systems made governance and compliance complicated,” Chaim added.

Puget Sound Energy relies heavily on SAP software, and it was the company’s SAP account executive who introduced Chaim to Sodales on SAP App Center. “The App Center was very easy to use, within minutes of a product demonstration, we were eager to learn how we could add it to our HR application system,” Chaim said.

Two factors helped with Puget Sound Energy’s decision to go with Sodales Labor Relations Software. The first was the user experience, which Nel said would make the company’s labor relations processes easy to manage. The fact that the app was also designed to integrate with SAP’s on premise human capital management (HCM) software as well as the cloud-based SAP SuccessFactors HCM solution was the other factor. “This integration makes it much easier to manage labor relations,” Chaim said.
Integration with SAP SuccessFactors solutions was also a factor in the choice of Sodales’ Health and Safety Environment Management app by Schindler Group, a global manufacturer of elevators, escalators, and walkways based in Ebikon, Switzerland. Schindler was looking to replace a Lotus Notes-based tool that it had developed internally for tracking health and safety issues on site. Among other issues, the Notes tool was unable to support a highly mobile workforce. “In our business, everything happens in the field,” said Frédéric Bertrand, Coordinator for Safety and Health at Schindler. For a global company like Schindler, mobile workforce support had become essential for managing the installation and service of its elevators and other equipment in buildings and at construction sites around the world.

Bertrand looked at different possible solutions and settled on a partnership with Sodales, which was interested in building an app specific to Schindler’s requirements as part of Sodales’ efforts to move forward with plans to focus on its software business. Working with Sodales, Schindler was able to help design an app that met its complex safety reporting requirements while providing connectivity to the company’s SAP SuccessFactors-based HRMS system. Those requirements included strict adherence to Schindler’s security and privacy rules, something that made developing on the SAP Cloud Platform an essential part of the company’s use of the Sodales app. The built-in security capabilities of SAP Cloud Platform and SAP HANA meant that “they passed our internal tests without any issues,” Bertrand said.

The built-in security is an essential part of the reason Sodales is partnering with SAP and participating on SAP App Center. “We have situations where customers in highly regulated industries have very strict security requirements,” said Salam. “And you wouldn’t be able to pass that unless...you’re on the SAP Cloud Platform.”

The initial success of Health and Safety Environment Management has led to other departments at Schindler looking in SAP App Center for new functionality, and the company plans to continue to partner with Sodales to expand its efforts to manage employee health and safety. The integration with SAP SuccessFactors solutions opens up new ways to track and incent safety practices and manage those processes in the employee record, Bertrand added.

The result of engagements with companies like Schindler and the utility company underscore the value of using SAP App Center as the nexus for new business development and customer acquisition by SAP partners. Importantly, SAP App Center was specifically set up to make it easy for sales executives to find and recommend new partner products that complement and, as in the case of Sodales, add significant value to an existing SAP software implementation. That win/win scenario makes all the difference for a company like Sodales. “[With] App Center, [SAP] has done a tremendous job in enabling the internal SAP sales team as well as the internal product teams and making sure that they are aligning partner products with the customer’s needs,” said Salam.

The result is that customers are recognizing that SAP App Center is an important resource for their innovation efforts, Salam added. “App Center is really trying to promote innovative products and access to newer innovation technologies very quickly,” she said. And for Sodales and its customers, this is making all the difference.