SAP App Center and WorkSpan: Innovating the Ecosystem Management Function

The second in a series of EAC Focus Reports on how SAP App Center is enabling customers to have access to innovation in a consumer-like experience.

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More and more, the lifelines of a company pass through an ecosystem of partners helping one another to succeed. These interconnections are essential to the efficiencies and levels of service that are demanded in today’s global economy. With a strong ecosystem, individual companies can scale higher and faster. Without an ecosystem to support it, a company is relegated to fighting for recognition, market share, and coverage alone against a sea of competitors.

This requirement makes managing partner ecosystems a core strategic capability, one that can account for up to 40% of a company’s revenues, according to the Chasm Institute. And while many successful companies have active partner programs, most try to manage those programs using technology poorly suited to the unique requirement of ecosystem management. Unleashing this strategic value was the point of departure for WorkSpan, an ecosystem cloud software company and SAP App Center vendor based in Foster City, CA. “No company in this day and age innovates or goes to market alone,” Amit Sinha, WorkSpan’s co-founder and chief customer officer told EAC. In order to be successful in today’s global economy “networks of companies need to come together,” Sinha added.

That’s precisely where WorkSpan plays its role. The company’s products allow alliance and channel managers to efficiently run complex partner programs by managing core functions, such as joint sales and marketing, joint solution development, and the allocation of market development funds. Importantly, partners are part of the management process, and WorkSpan’s ecosystem cloud allow the
alliance program to share important information and processes with individual partners while maintaining strict privacy and security controls.

WorkSpan’s journey to the SAP App Center started early in the company’s history, aided in no small part by the fact that Sinha started WorkSpan after an almost 12-year stint at SAP. WorkSpan initially joined the SAP PartnerEdge “Integrate” partner program, and naturally gravitated to SAP App Center as its products became generally available. The ability to commercialize on the SAP App Center platform was a huge boost for WorkSpan, Sinha said. “We would really be struggling if we did not have a platform like SAP App Center to go to market with.”

“App Center came at the right point in time for us. It gave us the enterprise scale so we could grow very very rapidly,” Sinha added.

One of the main values SAP App Center brings is a faster time to value for WorkSpan’s customers. This translates into a strategic differentiator for WorkSpan. A customer can discover one of the WorkSpan apps, then test drive it, buy it, and begin installation all without leaving the website. This simplicity is what makes SAP App Center so useful. “Just as the buying process is shortened, so is the on-boarding process,” Sinha added.

That was very much the experience of Roland Wartenberg, the senior director for alliance programs at NetApp, a vendor of software solutions for data and hybrid cloud management based in Sunnyvale, CA. “You don’t want a tool with a long implementation period, you want to do it right away,” said Wartenberg. “That was the App Center offering: easy to find and easy to use.”

The “easy to find and use” app that Wartenberg found was WorkSpan’s Ecosystem Cloud, a comprehensive suite that allows NetApp to manage the extensive partner ecosystem associated with NetApps’ own partnership with SAP. The app is an integral part of Wartenberg’s partner management efforts and represents a significant improvement over how alliance programs are traditionally managed. Indeed, Wartenberg’s interest in moving beyond the traditional tools of the alliance manager’s trade is what sent him looking for a better solution. “You have two choices. You can go the traditional way, with tons of email attachments, PowerPoints, Excel spreadsheets, email, etc. Or you look for a tool where you enhance the cooperation between partners in an almost automatic way,” Wartenberg explained. Wartenberg characterizes the experience he was looking for as a “partner CRM.”

The ability to manage the special requirements of alliance programs lead Wartenberg directly to WorkSpan. Alliance management isn’t just about managing partner data, there is “content from traditional CRM, marketing, solution and product management – especially when you create joint programs,” Wartenberg said. “You want to find that special tool that allows you to do everything and bring the partners along in a secure way.”

Ensuring security at multiple levels was a key part of WorkSpan’s use of SAP solutions and its technology stack. WorkSpan’s products utilize SAP Cloud Platform (SAP CP) to securely integrate with SAP C4/HANA and provide attribute-based access control for the data. This allows companies to determine their access policy, share fields with partners as needed, and maintain control of data privacy. These and other attributes from the SAP technology stack allow WorkSpan to provide levels of security and privacy that would be normally outside the reach of an early-stage company.
Security is of critical concern in the partner alliance world, Sinha added. “We have data about customer opportunities, marketing campaigns and early solution ideas,” Sinha said. The SAP CP technology allows WorkSpan to support attribute-based access control, which allows its customers to “share what they want to share” and keep the rest of their strategic data “closer to their vest.”

For Wartenberg, the configurability of the security profiles was an important criterion for his choice of WorkSpan’s Enterprise Cloud and one that was a key part of the implementation and configuration process. “When we implemented WorkSpan, I was very hard with our team to make sure that everything is secured,” Wartenberg explained. “There were a lot of policies to protect. When you work with different partners and you upload sensitive data and legal documents you want to be 100 percent, 200 percent sure that what you put there is visible for the people you allow and not to other people.”

The integration capabilities built into SAP CP were also critical for WorkSpan’s success. “We tell companies that they may run on any CRM,” Sinha told EAC. “Using [SAP CP], we get data from our partners and the alliance manager, across a very heterogeneous landscape. That data creates a shared system of record based on a shared truth across the company, facilitated by [SAP CP].”

The ability of SAP CP to facilitate the integration of heterogeneous data was another important selling point for NetApp. “We can use this for all of our end users, our salesforce and our partners,” Wartenberg added. The integration with SAP Cloud Platform and the SAP App Center is helping to position WorkSpan for continued growth. SAP CP will allow WorkSpan to utilize new capabilities in fields such as artificial intelligence for its next set of offerings, Sinha said. And SAP App Center will be a key part of how those new products are commercialized. “As companies go to market together, App Center will become a new norm,” Sinha said. For NetApp and WorkSpan, that future is already here today.