

Rewarding work for Cisco VARs

Resellers welcome plans from new UK channel boss Richard Roberts to reward the worthy. Sam Trendall finds out more

"Esteem must be founded on preference: to hold everyone in high esteem is to esteem nothing."

17th century French playwright Molière's quote may be more than four centuries old, but it could still be epithetic for networking giant Cisco's partners this year.

Richard Roberts took over as head of the vendor's UK and Ireland partner organisation in August. Speaking to CRN a few days before Christmas, the channel boss explained that "preference" would be the watchword this year.

Ensuring that Cisco is a preferred vendor for resellers is one side of the coin. "Can they prove they have the capability to bring certifications to market? Can they make sure our sales guys get paid?" explained Roberts.

But more important is rewarding VARs commensurately for their efforts in the field.

"If there is an opportunity [Cisco] does not see, [partners] should see some preference in pricing," he added. "We are gearing our high-touch guys, we are driving them as part of their personal sales metrics to bring the preference in [earlier]. The best salespeople do that anyway."

Paul Sweeney, managing director of Gold partner ANS Group, welcomed the greater focus on committed and proactive partners, and the moves towards a more efficacious deal registration programme. "I think they need to do it, and they are doing it. I have been asking for this for two years, and Richard is delivering," he said.

"But they have rebate programmes that incentivise certain areas above others – I know unified communications gets a lot of focus. I would like to see the datacentre given equal focus, but I guess they are doing that in other ways."

Fast and simple

Paul Cobby, managing director of Premier partner Besttel, claimed he would welcome "faster deal registration processes and a simplification of back-end promotions".

"Cisco has moved some processes offshore and the length of time to get deals approved has actually increased rather than decreased," he explained.



In demand: Richard Roberts, head of Cisco's UK and Ireland partner organisation, says "preference" is this year's watchword as he aims to increase the vendor's attractiveness to resellers

Mark Johnson, managing director of Premier partner ConvergeOne, welcomed the plans to tighten the deal registration process. The vendor's array of programmes and structures can be tough to navigate for partners, he added, with Q1 traditionally being a harder quarter in which to push through sales, as Cisco's back-end systems are retooled for the new fiscal year.

"If they can address that, it will be a big plus – very, very positive," he said. "But if you are on the ball with the Cisco deal registration programme, you stand to make a lot of money and get more preferential treatment. With other vendors, it is a bit more loose than that."

Cisco: at your service

Cisco recently published its *Services Rules of Engagement*, outlining rules and best practice for both the vendor and its partners in areas such as joint account planning, coverage models and the availability of certain tools and services. Roberts claimed the document is "very flexible and not dogmatic".

"The document is not new, we are just codifying what good practice has always been," he added.

Tony Butler, chief technology officer at Cisco-focused third-party services player Intact, claimed he has recently seen a step change in the vendor's approach to services.

"If you had asked me a year ago, my answer probably would have been different. But, over the past few months, Cisco seems to have woken up to the fact that the services market is a key factor in gaining market share," he said.

Cisco currently addresses the services space in two specified ways. The first is customer-led: a high-touch model for about 500 "transformational accounts", a collection of customers with pan-global footprints that were first defined in 2010.

Partner-led sales are the order of the day for all other customers.

Roberts claimed that Cisco does not add swathes of customers to the transformational account list, and that smaller resellers are not precluded from getting involved in delivery to these customers.

"We do not have customers flooding in [to the transformational accounts]. We have more going out: when the customer's power base shifts →