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Microsoft Gold Partner Streamline Systems Finds Differentiation Using Business Impact Assessment

The best Microsoft Gold Partners all consider themselves strategic partners for their clients, not merely technology solutions providers. Larry Cohn, the Senior Partner, at Streamline Systems, www.streamlinesys.com, a Microsoft Gold Partner, has developed a unique program that demonstrates Gold Partners are not all the same. According to Cohn, “We offer and deliver Business Impact Assessments, Business Process Workshops, and Project Scoping to increase our customers’ success rate.”

Many companies, particularly in the manufacturing and industrial sectors, end up selecting technology solutions by Microsoft because they are comfortable, familiar, and trusting of the company; certainly of the stability and solidity in the marketplace.

The concept of business improvement, whether part of a lean initiative, Six Sigma, or other continued process improvement methodologies, is often one of the metrics or deliverables offered by many Microsoft Gold Partners.

That said, there are many Microsoft Gold Partners. Microsoft competencies align with how customers actually buy, making it easier for these certified experts to promote an organization’s skills and expertise to customers. At the silver level, these consultancies are better positioned to showcase business focus and experience—and gain a competitive advantage. With gold competencies, firms demonstrate the highest, most consistent capability, and commitment to a particular business solution area.

Business Impact Assessment

Streamline’s Business Impact Assessment, (BIA), is designed as a Senior Executive workshop for companies considering technology to help grow a company or become better equipped to compete. The system is also suited for companies looking to improve or upgrade their existing systems, such as ERP (enterprise resource planning.) Cohn assured, “The workshop is lead by a senior professional consultant trained in leading this type of session. It provides a forum for executives discuss and ultimately clearly understand the business impacts of a given solution. The process is iterative with the end-objective to have a good understanding of the financial impact and benefits of the proposed solution.”

BIA Process Proves Vital for ROI Technology

The focus of process improvement offered by technology providers, jumps too quickly to a purchase decision rather than thoroughly examining the impact of industry drivers and market forces. Cohn insists, “This process engages the executives in lively discussion regarding some of their challenges; the competitive landscape, and what forces may be working against their success. It also creates some tension, but helps identify some root causes that often drive

participants to make certain decisions.”

Key strategies and objectives helps to identify how the team is responding to the market forces and driving business. In this exercise, companies learn what is important to them, and how they manage their business. As an example, a company has an objective of maintaining 45% gross profit margin with a strategy to focus on raw material supply costs. Being clear about these strategies and objectives usually relieves tension and puts the team back in a position of power and control.

Moving the discussion down to the strategy and tactical levels, helps identify what might be preventing companies from meeting objectives or being successful with a particular strategy. This too creates tension, especially if there are significant challenges. “Only after these steps are taken should a company engage in a conversation about effective business processes and solutions,” noted Cohn.

Specific proposed solutions, and how they might address the various challenges and strategies is logically the next step. If a manufacturer’s order entry process is so cumbersome that they can only process one order at a time and it takes an hour to prepare it, an effective process or solution would be the Order Entry mechanisms and processes of an integrated ERP system. Another challenge frequently encountered is excess inventory.

Tension is relieved...solutions are provided; a vision for overcoming each challenge is revealed. Companies develop a business case, which translates the proposed solutions into savings, and ultimately return on investment (ROI.) Cohn explains, “Using company input, real company financial data, and perceived values, participants in a Streamline Business Impact Assessment have full ownership of the numbers. When we have a solid business case, the company can fully justify all or part of the proposed solution and the team can fully own.”

This process, when done at the beginning of an ERP selection, can definitely help clarify the real needs of the company, highlight solutions and benefits, as well as establish priorities and objectives. Instead of doing a boilerplate implementation, a company might decide they need bar code data collection before anything else; they may need a CRM (customer relationship management) solution desperately. Streamline may implement that urgent solution requirement; demonstrate significant benefits, which in turn helps pay for the complete ERP solution.

The unique element in the BIA is the Shared Risk strategy. Cohn said, “If we share the same assessment of their business and the solutions that will give them the highest return, we can also share the risk of the project and ensure results.”

The combination of this professional approach to assessment, continued process improvement, combined with exceptionally experienced industry sector experts, creates differentiation. For those firms who are looking to a Microsoft Gold Partner these qualities are precisely the variables to consider; they often trump the technology itself.

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