

Industry Marketing

Is it Worth the Investment?



story by **CHERYL SALAZAR** | illustration by **MATT MASTRUD**

At The Partner Marketing Group, we are asked this question time and again. This article is not meant to be a definitive guide to industry marketing but offers a few good reasons why you should invest in it and provides a few pointers to get you started. For those resellers who have already made the investment, hopefully the tips help you gain better traction in your chosen industry.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the full definition of industry includes: “1. diligence in an employment or pursuit; especially: steady or habitual effort. 2. systematic labor especially for some useful purpose or the creation of something of value.” In line with this definition, committing yourself to an industry (or two) is going to require systematic effort on behalf of your entire organization in order for you to be successful at it and recognized for your expertise.

GRASP THE BENEFITS

How can you embrace an industry initiative in a way that is sustainable and repeatable, and that powers future business growth? Why should you do it?

One of the benefits of focusing on a specific industry is that it has the potential to unlock more profits for you. Industry prospects look for providers who are able to supply them with end-to-end integrated solutions from the front office, the back office, hardware provisioning, networking capabilities, and so on. These prospects look for the single provider who can deliver on all their technology requirements.

Another compelling reason why you should consider an industry focus: You have the potential to expand beyond borders. Industries across the world face similar challenges. This is an opportunity for you as a reseller to either partner with a reseller in another country to deliver solutions there, or open that local office so you can expand. And then you have an excuse to spend your next vacation in that exotic location (aka “customer onsite”) you’ve always wanted to visit.

UNDERSTAND THE OPPORTUNITY

You may be tempted to bite off more than you can chew by trying to build expertise in more than one industry at a time. Take a good look at your current customer data – in which industry(s) do you have the most customers, is there a specific vertical that you’re best at, where you have the most competent consultants? When piecing together your offering, identify what prevents you from providing a total solution. Are there ISVs you can partner with to complete your solution, or do you need to create your own IP?

It is also important to identify who your new competitors are and understand how your solution competes with theirs. Document how your solution is different and adds value so you can ensure your prospects understand that, too.

Use the resources that you have on hand to help you compete in this environment. Is your Microsoft solution more affordable, is there an offer you can entice your prospects with that can help you gain their attention? Is there a hosting provider that can help you fill in your gaps or help you deliver part of your solution via the cloud versus on-premises?

BUILD CREDIBILITY

One of the most important exercises you can do is to spend the time understanding the needs and requirements of your prospects in detail. Start by spending time with some of your loyal existing clients. Understand the personas who influence their decisions, document their pains, and understand how they meet their requirements. Remember to reward them for their time, and don’t forget to ask them for a testimonial and a referral.

Using this information, construct a persona document that captures the nuances of the various buyer and influencer roles that you have the potential to reach. Understand what the CEO, CFO, COO, IT buyer, and frustrated end user look for in a solution. Each of these personas is looking for something different and consumes their information in different formats.

Through the creation of a rich set of content for each of these personas, you create the perception



that your solution is tailored to their needs and appeals on an emotional level. Once you have constructed the messaging framework, make sure you share it with everyone in your organization. It's important that everyone who touches a prospect or services an existing client understands these messages and reinforces them.

UNDERSTAND THE SEGMENT

Your prospects won't take the time to come to you if they don't know you – you have to take the time to go to them. It is important to understand where they go to learn about new technologies. Do they conduct web research, do they belong to associations, how do they consume their information, what tradeshows do they attend and who goes? Once you have a decent understanding of where your prospects congregate, align your efforts accordingly. This may seem overwhelming and out of your reach, but if need be, start with the 50- to 100-mile radius of your office. Dedicated focus and relationship building will get you started. Once you have three of four (or more) clients, invest more time and money, cast your net wider, and expand your reach. It takes time, it takes years, and it takes dedication.

ALIGN MARKETING AND SALES

Your marketing and sales teams need to be aligned and share their learnings along the way. Gather a small team together to build your industry message and align your marketing content. Have the sales and implementation team work together to:

- » Map out the total solution.
- » Document the process that you go through with prospects.
- » Capture the learnings you have from existing customers.
- » Share it with the team.

Marketing aligns the messaging and creates offers that map to the discovery, pre-sales, and post-sales process. Consider how you will support these new clients on an ongoing basis. Will you offer a multi-year support service or even same-day support? NOTE: Your industry-specific support services could be a key differentiator between you and your fiercest competitors.

"JustFoodERP was founded when Microsoft first started discussing that the future was heading towards truly differentiating yourself as Partners in the market and delivering real value. We invested in research early, we won a few very important customers, and then we immediately ensured that we started hiring all new employees from the food industry. If I were going to offer advice to a Partner looking at changing from a horizontal to vertical organization, I would recommend that the first thing you do is market research. There are so many industries that are not served well, and there is a lot of room to serve those markets. IP now has a large footprint. Customers purchase our solution because we have about 50 percent food industry-specific functionality built on top of Microsoft Dynamics. It wasn't an easy climb, but I feel confident that we made the right choice to become vertically focused."

David Pilz
CEO, JustFoodERP

So many great resources, so many long URLs! Save some time and either scan the QR code or go to www.thepartnerchannel.com/industry-marketing-resources to find quick links to the information below.

- » Microsoft helps you get started. If you focus on manufacturing, financial services, public sector, retail, or services, kick off your initiatives with this content: <https://mbs.microsoft.com/partnersource/northamerica/sales-marketing/campaigns-demand-generation/advertising-awareness/MSFTDynamicsIndustryLandingPage>
- » Automate your horizontal efforts by utilizing these resources: https://mbs.microsoft.com/partnersource/northamerica/sales-marketing/product-strategy-direction/MSDYN_ERPVolumeinSMBcampaign
- » Microsoft works with Microsoft Dynamics-savvy vendors to build resources for you to leverage: <https://mbs.microsoft.com/partnersource/northamerica/sales-marketing/marketing-collateral/messaging-frameworks/MSB>
- » Promotions are updated regularly. Use these to lure your prospects: <https://mbs.microsoft.com/partnersource/northamerica/pricing-ordering/promotions>



ALIGN CONTENT

In a recent survey conducted by The Partner Marketing Group, 66.7 percent of respondents stated that at least 50 percent of the content they create is industry-specific. That's a much higher number than we expected, and we were pleasantly surprised by it! It clearly shows that marketers in our industry have adopted the "go vertical" message to differentiate themselves.

It's important that your keywords are very specific to your industry. Understand what terms your prospects use in their searches, and make a short list. These keywords should appear on your website, in your blogs, image alt+tags, social snippets, and so on. Keywords help to focus your content and should be shared with everyone who is contributing content.

Prospects will figure out soon enough if you're credible or not. They may ask for references or case studies. Ensure that you have at least one of each handy as you start to build out your content. Using your messaging framework and your segment brief, start by creating one piece of thought leadership content each quarter for each persona. This content can be in the form of a SlideShare presentation, an ebook, or a video. You can surround each of those pieces with two to three emails (if you have an opt-in list in your database), relevant landing pages on your website to capture contact details, and social snippets to feed your social properties, and you can supplement the content with blogs relevant to your personas. If this seems too overwhelming, then start with just one persona and build from there.

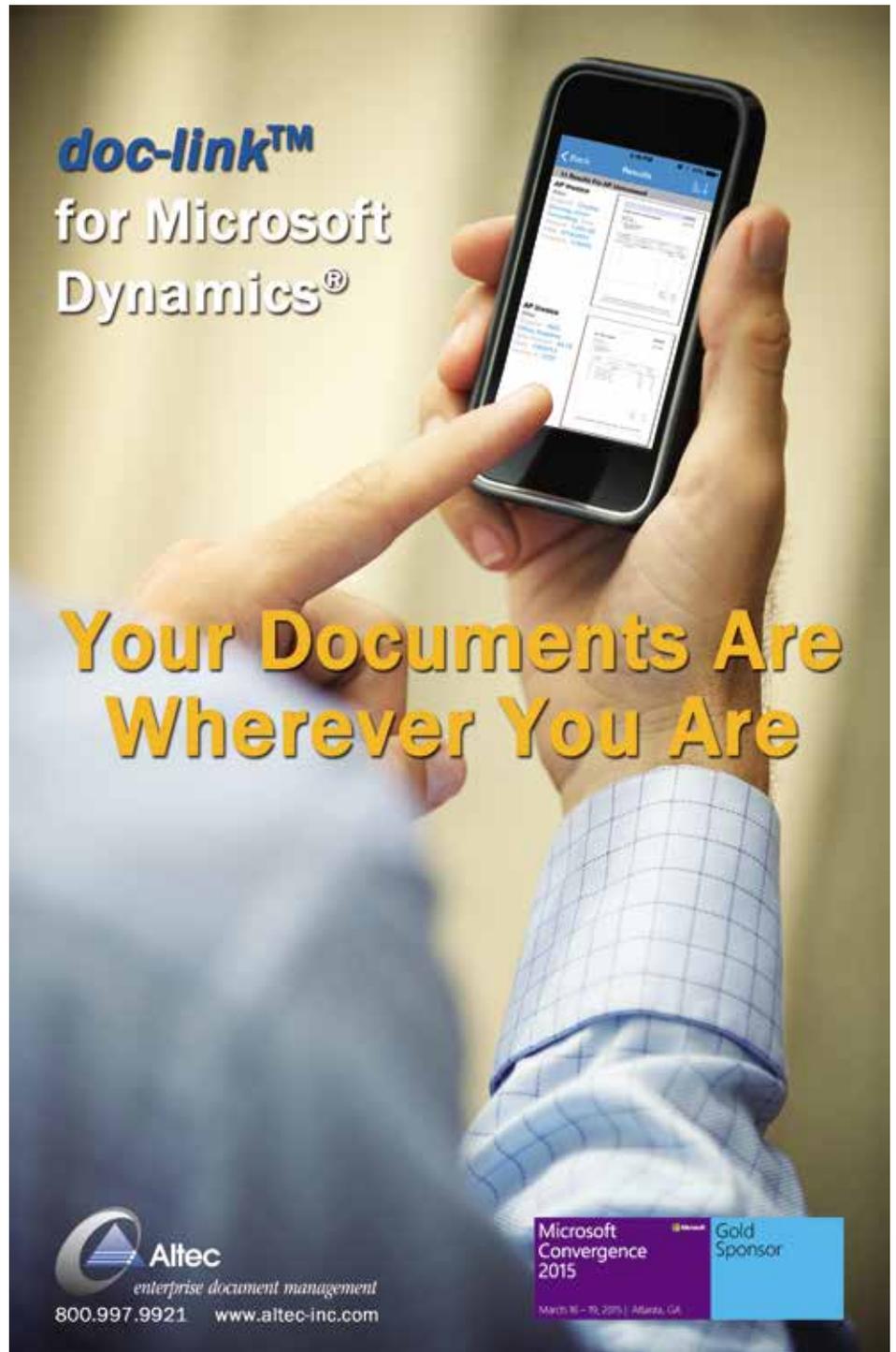
When considering content, never forget that Microsoft has already invested in a rich set of content that is ready for reuse. While some of it may seem very horizontal in nature, you can repurpose it to fit your requirements.

PINPOINT YOUR BUSINESS

This is an often neglected asset. Leverage the power of Microsoft and its web properties. Create a service overview on Pinpoint (<https://pinpoint.microsoft.com/>). Use your keywords within your write-up and include links to your content, offers, free trials, and case studies.

DO YOU QUIT THE "HORIZONTAL" BUSINESS?

This is another question we are asked all the time. It takes time and an investment to realign your organization around an industry. You need to do it to grow your business, and of course, no one wants to walk away from a new client, but shifting focus does mean that you need to find a different way to address your horizontal business.



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Microsoft has made a significant investment in an ERP nurture campaign that you can use for outreach to a horizontal audience. By automating this outreach, you free up time to focus on your industry initiative. Use their newly updated nurture campaign as a way to address marketing to this audience. Replace relevant pieces within it with your own content – such as case studies, existing video, slide decks, and so on – to optimize it for your needs.

Focusing on an industry takes time, it takes effort, and it can seem daunting. Breaking it down into building blocks and engaging the efforts of your entire organization will get you there. Once your foundations have been laid and you have a regular rhythm in place, you may find that your industry efforts will splinter into a series of micro-verticals where you find even more opportunity to invest.

Consider the food industry, for example. The food industry is enormous and continues to grow – you have micro verticals such as organic food producers or vegan food producers. Within that you may have only organic cheese makers or gluten-free bakeries. The most important thing for you to do is focus, focus, focus before you expand. Obtain four to five customers in a vertical before you move over to the next one. Look for the one that has similarities to the vertical you are already in, where your solution can naturally translate because prospects are experiencing similar challenges. 🌐

If you need assistance getting your industry marketing strategy off the ground, or help invigorating the one you already have, contact Cheryl Salazar (Csalazar@thepartnermarketinggroup.com) to learn how to reap more rewards from your industry marketing initiatives and power your business growth. To obtain a copy of The Partner Marketing Group survey mentioned in this article, email Michelle@thepartnermarketinggroup.com.

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