

4 Reasons You Need To Build A Software Training Partner Network (Jul 15)

Posted by Bill Cushard on Jul 27, 2015

Many enterprise software companies have partner programs designed to accelerate the deployment of software products at a rate at which a technology company could not achieve on its own. Most partner programs are focused on the technical implementation of a technology, which is critical since most enterprise customers know they need to adopt the technology in question, but lack the expertise to implement it. It is surprising then that more partner programs do not include a training partnership element, considering how many enterprise customers "lack the expertise to implement" these products.

If partner programs are so vital to the success of software company growth, why do they predominantly include technical implementation help when there is such a huge opportunity to help customers adopt the software and get the most out of it?

There are several reasons for this:

1. Many enterprise software companies do not believe customers need much training support beyond a kick-off call.
2. Software companies think training development and delivery needs to be built in-house.
3. Training is just plain overlooked.

I believe there is a huge missed opportunity here. Just because a software product has been deployed technically, does not mean the customer's organization knows how to use it or otherwise achieve the desired outcomes that the software product promises. So, now you might be thinking, "OK, Bill. Fine. This explains why I need to offer training to customers, but not why I need a partner network to do it."

Good point.

Here is how I address that question.

Why build a training partner network?

There are four main reasons to build a training partner network.

To scale training operations

One of the most important reasons to build a training partner network is to scale training delivery at a rate that can keep up with the rapid growth you may be experiencing in training volumes. If your training is gaining any kind of traction, you are likely experiencing a volume of requests that scares the heck out of you. You don't want to build a team large enough to handle these requests, but you need to deliver on that volume. By setting up a training partner network, you can spread these requests among your partners. And if you have training partners in multiple geographies, handling requests all over the world seems possible, if not very doable.

To extend the reach of your training offering

Related to the issue of scale, a training partner network can help you extend your reach all over the world. If global companies start buying your product, they may have teams in multiple countries that need training. Trust me, when you receive your first question to delivering training in a country on the other side

of the world, it seems impossible. But if you have a partner in or near that country, it is such a load off to contact your partner and put them in touch with your customer. A training partner network can be built so that you have coverage in any major region of the world.

To leverage local expertise

As you receive training requests in other countries, you will run into questions like, "Will the training be in our local language?" "Will the training be onsite?" Some cultures have reputations for requiring training be in their local language. Some cultures are not fans of training conducted via a virtual classroom tool.

There are other differences in how training is conducted by culture. For example, highly interactive teaching styles work well in some cultures, but one-way lecture-style delivery is the preferred method in others. You do not want to get these mixed up.

Local expertise matters when it comes to conducting business in countries foreign to your own. Knowledge of the local language, local market, and customers is difficult to obtain. A training partner network can help you obtain it.

So you can focus on your product

I am now speaking directly to early stage enterprise software company founders, CEOs, and the rest of the CXOs. The earlier you are in your company maturity, the more you need to be focused on what you are producing and to whom you are selling it. Building a training function is hard and will take a considerable amount of effort and attention. By building a training partner network, you can focus more attention on building and selling your product. If you hire a good training leader, this person can manage that network of local experts who can help your customers get up and running on the product you just sold them, allowing you to focus in building and shipping your product.

What about the downside?

Certainly a training partner network is not the answer for everyone. The downside is quality control. After all, by building a partner network, you are sending people who don't work for you into your customers' offices. Your training partners might be terrible and that will reflect badly on you, which could cause you to lose customers. To account for this risk, you will need to put processes in place, like train-the-trainer programs and post-training surveys and continuous training partner education programs.

Training partner networks are not all roses, and it does take hard work, but if you are growing fast and have a high demand to help customers adopt your software, there are few scalable ways to meet this growing demand than by building and running a training partner network.