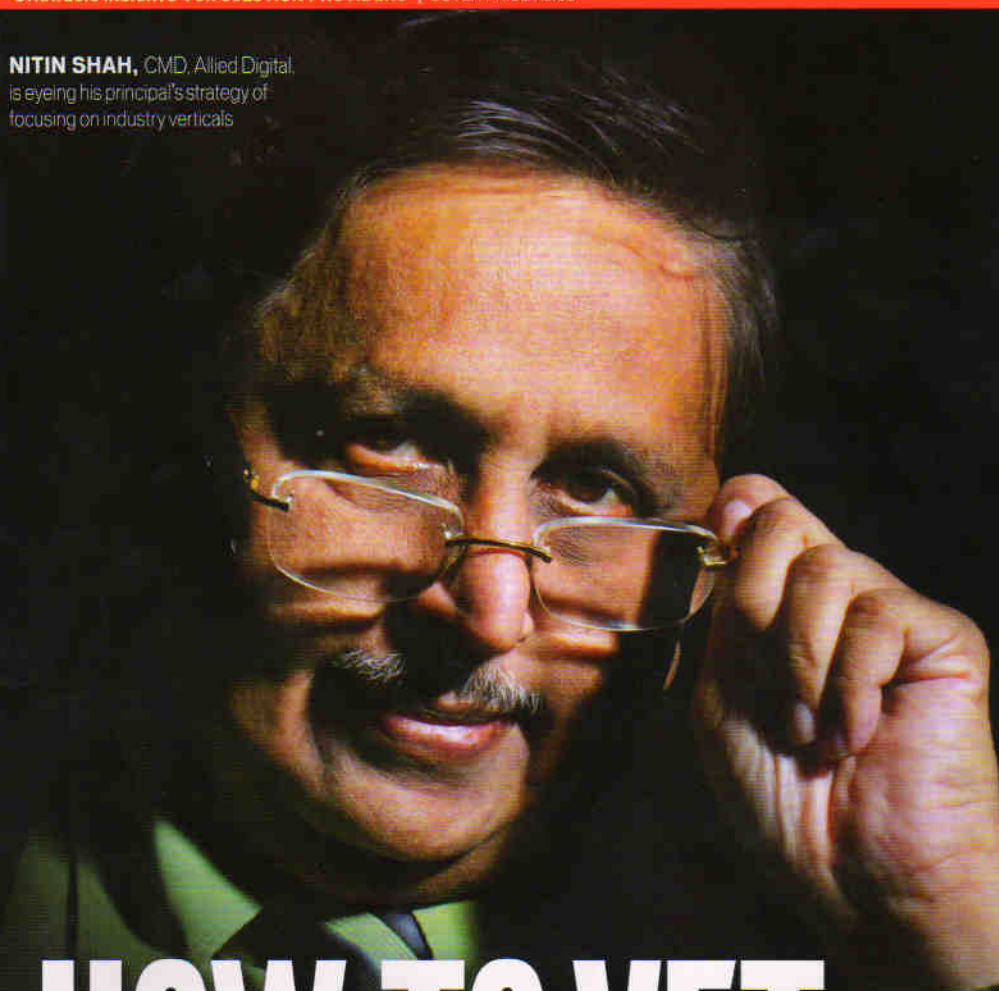


# INDIAN ChannelWorld

STRATEGIC INSIGHTS FOR SOLUTION PROVIDERS | COVER PRICE Rs.50

**NITIN SHAH**, CMD, Allied Digital, is eyeing his principal's strategy of focusing on industry verticals



## HOW TO VET YOUR VENDOR

A look at how the best technology vendors differentiate themselves from the rest >>> **Page 21**



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**I**DENTIFYING VENDORS who are leaders in a category is one thing. But identifying vendors who display certain strong characteristics or traits across categories is entirely another. While the former helps partners in finding out perceived category leaders, the latter helps in understanding the best practices employed by the vendors. It throws light on how the leading vendors with their commitment and focus establish benchmarks in certain areas for others to follow.

When we analyze the results of the MVP survey, it becomes clear that some companies are strong in certain areas like say technology solutions or customer service across categories that they are present in. These are their areas of perceived strength.

For instance, IBM was rated consistently highly by the partners for its technology innovation across categories like servers, systems & network management software, and storage management software.

Allied Digital, which has been associated with IBM since the

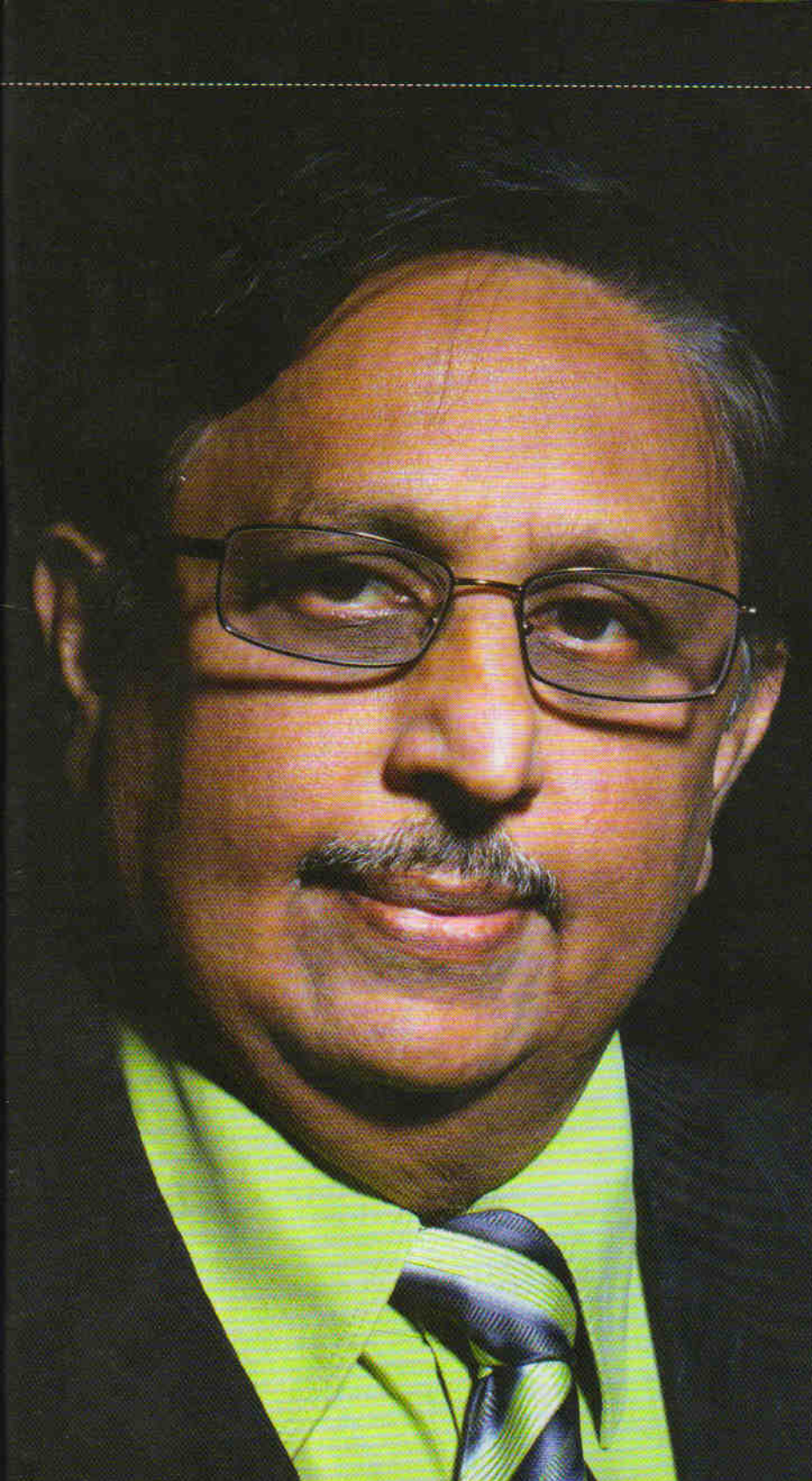
mainframe era in 1978, throws some light on this. Chairman & Managing Director Nitin Shah says, "Allied Digital Services was inception on the learning from IBM services in early eighties. We look upon IBM as role model for our organization. For IBM technology or products, it's a full stop. No questions can be asked about their innovation."

An IBM Premier Business Partner, Allied Digital understands enterprise customers' needs. "This [IBM technology] has helped us clinch some of country's biggest deals in the past

## INDIA'S

# MOST VALUED PRINCIPALS

In one of the largest surveys, 520 solution providers rate the performance of 85 technology vendors across 15 categories. **By Team ChannelWorld**



**“ IBM technology has helped us clinch some of the biggest deals**

**NITIN SHAH, CHAIRMAN & MANAGING DIRECTOR, ALLIED DIGITAL**

decade. In many cases, IBM technology was a real differentiator and deal clincher,” says Shah.

Allied Digital is following IBM's philosophy to move from marginalized product business to focus on technology solutions and service industry verticals. “IBM is a very ethical company in terms of their partner ecosystem. We are trying to imitate best practices of IBM in our company,” explains Shah.

Similarly, Check Point was another such company which received consistent high scores for its technology across categories that it is present in. Sanjay Agarwal, Director, Momentum Infocare, says, “Check Point's technology offers ease of management for enterprise set-up and single consoled management for multiple technologies like UTM, DLP, encryption, etc. Check Point covers all the aspects of security relevant to customer, so we can offer entire spectrum.

#### **MARKETING MUSCLE**

However, when it comes to marketing assistance, HP and Symantec are clearly seen as the leaders across categories that they are present in. Partners evidently see this as the strength of the two vendors.

Vineet Panwar, VP, Sales, CI Infotech, opines that the kind of investments that HP makes for partners in branding activities helps tremendously to focus on the market. An HP partner for over 12 years now, CI Infotech has been able to achieve a consistent and steady growth rate in topline and bottomline due to the support that HP has given to the company through the Partner One program, wherein incentives are given to partner organizations for deals, training and certifications, etc.

HP's backend rebates have also found favor with Mumbai-based CDP India. Ankit Desai, CDP's Director says that the company's storage and server business is growing at a rate of 20-25 percent thanks mainly to the incentives HP shares not only with its own marketing executives, but also with the marketing executives in the channel organization.

Similarly, Symantec's bid to help partners with back end incentives

apparently has hit bulls' eye. Muneer Ahmed, Director, Digital Track, feels that Symantec's plan to pass on incentives of 9 percent of total deal value for closed projects valuing not less than \$5000 is a major sell out for partners and motivates them to achieve targets. He says, "Symantec rewards us even when we do not completely close the deal and it is registered by us (lead generation) with a 3 percent incentive." Incidentally, according to Ahmed, Digital Track recorded the maximum such closures and registrations in Chennai and this has been reportedly been acknowledged by the Symantec Regional Manager during the last QBR meet. A five year association with Symantec has been paying rich dividends to the organization with 25 percent of its total revenues attributable to Symantec products.

## EYE ON TRAINING

When it comes to training & certification, which is a major investment for solution providers as they try to suffice customer needs and win enterprise deals, partners continuously need to upgrade the skill sets of their technical team while working with

various principals. Here vendors like IBM and Symantec have been rated highly by partners across categories. The vendors scored consistent high scores for their training & certification practices across network security software, servers, BI, storage management software, and systems & network management software.

Harish Menon, COO, Futuresoft Solutions, says, "IBM's training & certification not only helps partners to be abreast on technology but also helps in getting new projects/ business opportunities." Especially for partners with a services practice, IBM certifications around Tivoli, Lotus, Websphere, DB2, Rational are must haves, adds Menon. "Training helps stay ahead in the curve and solicit more business. With skills around Tivoli, Lotus, DB2, investment in training our staff has also improved employee satisfaction," says Menon.

A silver partner of Symantec, Delhi headquartered MM9 Information Systems is focusing more on Symantec since past two years. "Due to customer demand for security products, we aligned with market leader like Symantec. We are enabling our team

on technologies like DLP, Patch management as the vendor is consistent with its training & certification practices across its widespread portfolio," says Manoj Sharma, MM9's CEO adding, "Rather than training more people, these people would get trained on breadth of other products for further penetration across customers." Apart from offering value to customer, a certified partner helps company's bottom lines by increasing its services business, says Sharma.

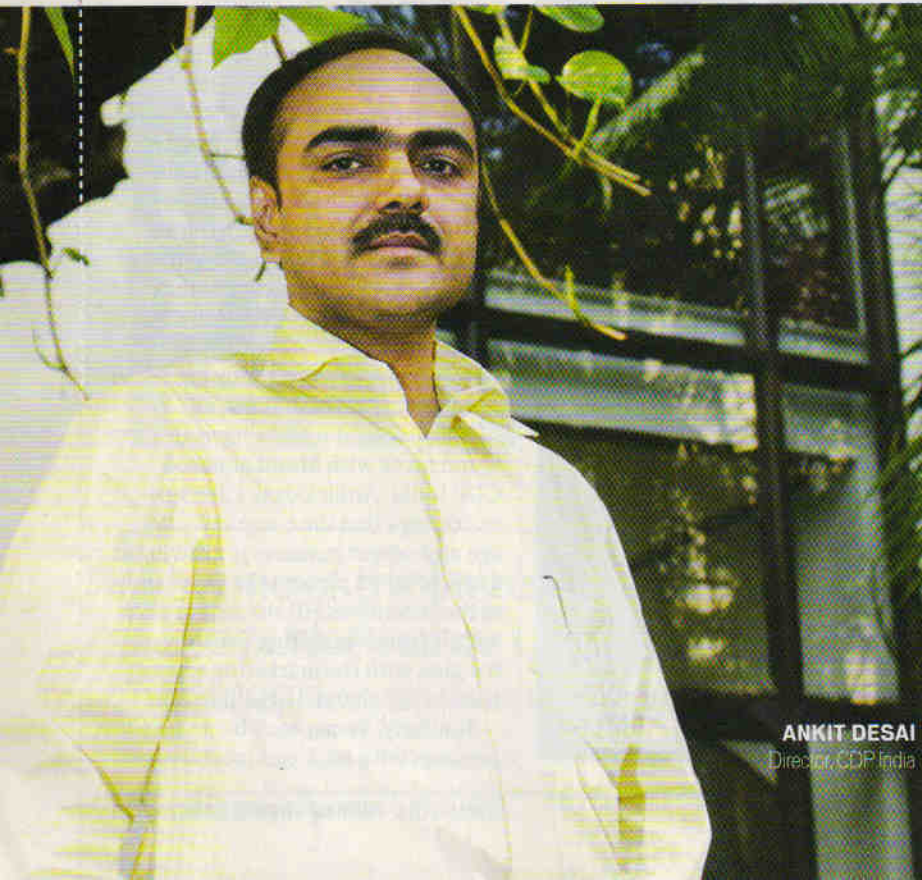
## SUPPORT STRENGTH

The importance of customer support can never be undermined. And companies who do well in this usually have a good and long lasting relationship with their customers. For companies like CA and Symantec, partners feel that customer support is certainly an area of strength with both firms being rated consistently high across categories.

Sri Harsha Subbanna, Vice President -Convergence and Communications, of Bangalore's G7 Infotech, feels that CA's service assurance background may have lots to do with its proactive customer support system. According to Subbanna, G7 has about 60-70 CA customers and there is a huge satisfaction quotient since CA's service team never waits for partners in the event of service issues and acts on a lead time of just two hours as against a promised lead time of 48 hours, which is way above the industry average. He says, "Apart from online support, CA also has multiple teams with single points of contact to engage with customers. This explains their effectiveness."

Subbanna further detailed that G7 also works with an ecosystem of partners who feel that the vendor's knowledge updates on industry aspects such as Cisco QoS and Brocade QoS, amongst others, also act as timely catalysts for problem solving.

T N Srinivasan, Business Head of Chennai-based Veeras Infotek, believes that Symantec's customer support mechanism is quite stable. He says, "Symantec has a great support system in place. Customer escalation processes are easier and are based on product lines."



**ANKIT DESAI**  
Director, GDP India

Srinivasan elaborates that for critical storage foundation support, one can get on the phone with a Symantec L3 support right away. This is because it is rated as part of DR for the customer. For AV, based on criticality, Srinivasan said that Symantec provides supports with clear timelines. Srinivasan says, "Critical support happens in 4-8 hours."

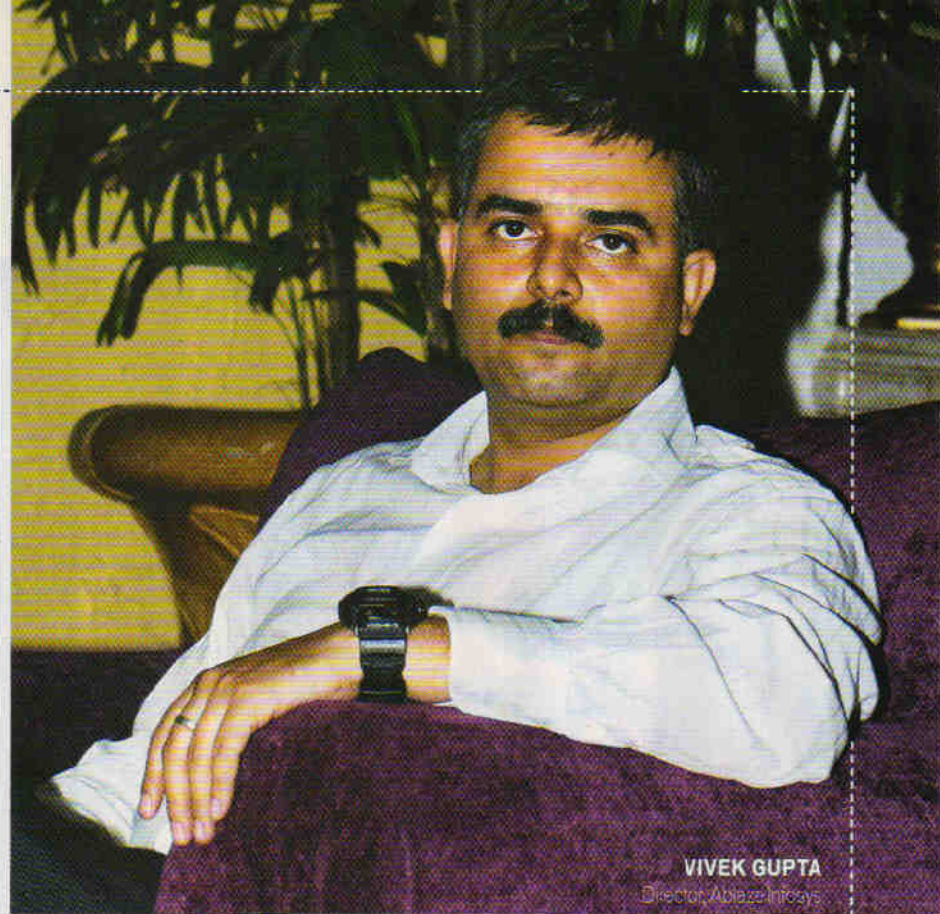
## MONEY MATTERS

Healthy margin is something that a partner would never want to compromise on as it's the one key factor that would make or break his business. Hence pricing flexibility offered by a vendor is always quite highly appreciated by its partners. Though it tends to depend a lot on the relationship between a vendor and a partner, CA and Symantec seem to lead the field when it comes financial terms. At least that's what the partners feel.

"Our relationship with CA goes back a long way. The vendor has always assured very good profitability. Better margins allow us to develop our skill sets on a regular basis and depute quality resources to provide quality services to the customer. This eventually results in better relationship and repeat business," explains Madhu Madhavan, CEO, Cubic Computing. The SI has bagged multiple deals and has successfully completed a good number of implementations for the vendor so far.

Symantec partners also speak with one voice about the company's flexible financial terms. Mumbai-based VDA Infosolutions, in fact a relatively new partner of Symantec, is quite happy with the way the vendor takes prompt calls when discounts are required. Though the SI has not closed very many deals for the vendor, the vendor has ensured double-digit margins for its 'not-so-big' partner. "We have got huge discounts from Symantec in spite of the fact that we are not a key partner for them. Though the transaction amounts were not very large, we have been able to get healthy margins," says Deepak Jadhav, Director, VDA Infosolutions.

Though diminishing margins is always pointed out as the biggest



**VIVEK GUPTA**  
Director, Ablaze Infosys

challenge of a systems integrator, vendors many a times don't do much to improve the situation. But if they are able to get into the act, it would surely result in partner loyalty and satisfaction.

## RELATIONSHIP REALITY

How many times were your calls to your channel manager unanswered? If it is way too many times, that speaks volumes about your principal's interest and involvement towards you. More than anything else, management style is something that is closely related to the culture of an organization. Unfortunately, it's not everyone's cup of tea. But companies that have invested considerable amount of time and effort on it have definitely seen the benefits. Partners feel that CA and IBM clearly hit the mark. Improved interaction levels, ability for conflict resolution, and role played in vetting technical specifications are factors by which the vendors were rated.

Ablaze Infosys, one of the old partners of IBM, recalls how the vendor improved its relationship with the SI as they evolved to become a key partner. "People in IBM are eas-

ily reachable and are prompt in their responses. In fact, I can reach out to people who are in higher levels as there are no hierarchy related complications," says Vivek Gupta, Director, Ablaze Infosys. "The vendor has many times gone out of the way to help us, especially in designing the right solution. IBM also ensures that people movement does not cause any trouble to us," he adds.

Gemini Communications, one of the key partners of CA, rates the vendor pretty high on its management style. "In the last couple of years, CA has almost doubled its field force. They have a dedicated set of people for each vertical and region, which makes it extremely easy to communicate with them and confidently approach the customer. One of the recent examples that I can recall is about the vendor's role in a banking deal that we bagged. The team from CA spent more than 20 days with us in convincing and showing the PoC to the customer," says A Krishnakumar, CMO of Gemini. "To say the least, I have many times had the CEO of CA visiting my office, which sums up the kind of focus it has towards its channel," he adds.