

Partnering across borders

Giant Step works with Microsoft and Enterprise Ireland to help Irish software companies gain significant incremental revenue in the UK market.

"The value of working with Microsoft to expand into the UK is clear. If ISVs have the right message and the right contacts, Microsoft UK teams can really accelerate their success. We needed Giant Step to help guide these partners in achieving this."

Judi Blackmur, Senior Advisor, Enterprise Ireland

giant

STEP

Customer: MICROSOFT AND ENTERPRISE IRELAND
www.microsoft.com
www.enterprise-ireland.com

Services provided

Giant Step's Microsoft Partner Engagement Acceleration Programme:

- Discovery workshop to identify target market and articulate vision for success
- Develop Microsoft value proposition and align business to Microsoft customer segments and vertical account teams
- Introduction to Microsoft contacts and development of joint Microsoft Partner Business plan
- Ongoing support to implement plan and evaluate success

Microsoft is an international organisation with international partners. Different Microsoft offices operate as loosely associated federations, with their own business plans and own metrics. Historically, these offices have acted fairly autonomously; working with their partners on a country-by-country basis.

ISVs wanting to expand overseas have tended to find that Microsoft teams in their target market know little or nothing about them and see no incentive to work with them. Nigel Turner, International Business Development Manager, Microsoft UK says: "We survey our partners every 6 months and one of the overwhelming facts coming out of these surveys is that partners would like to see Microsoft acting as a more internationally cohesive company. This feedback led us to create the Microsoft Open Borders programme to help partners engage with Microsoft teams in new national markets."

Creating a formal structure

An ideal opportunity to test the Open Borders initiative came from a drive by Enterprise Ireland to help Irish Microsoft-based ISVs grow their UK business. Enterprise Ireland is a commercially-focused body that invests heavily in industry and has a remit to help clients grow business through increased sales. It is one of the top twenty venture capital investors in the world, investing more than 1.2 billion euros in the last 9 years.

Enterprise Ireland began working with Microsoft in 2005, forming relationships with the Financial Services and Public Sector teams. This engagement resulted in numerous meetings and discussions but little actual output. Says Turner: "Enterprise Ireland entered into a fair amount of dialogue but there was no real action out of this and, critically, no buy-in from the Microsoft UK account teams."

Microsoft asked Giant Step to work with Enterprise Ireland to accelerate the engagement; knowing that they could help the ISVs make themselves heard above the general noise level and get some joint account activity under way. Turner confirms: "I knew that Giant Step would be able to put ISVs in touch with the right people in the right vertical teams and help them tailor their conversations to get meaningful buy-in. Giant Step was really the delivery mechanism for the whole programme."

Microsoft

ENTERPRISE IRELAND
Transforming Irish Industry

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Charlie Sherlock, CEO, Cinario

Giant Step worked with Enterprise Ireland and Microsoft to build the necessary relationships for partner expansion into the UK. The formalised engagement set out specific steps and methodologies for creating a structured relationship with the right people, at the right level.

Judi Blackmur, Senior Advisor, Enterprise Ireland, recognised the need for such a structured approach: “It was important for us to establish a repeatable programme with fixed cost. This would give us a clear picture of the cost to the partner and allow us to roll the programme out to assist more and more Microsoft ISVs.”

Giant Step began by helping to identify the right partners to work with. They focused initially on a small number of companies to demonstrate success before rolling the programme out to further organisations. The ISVs were selected on the basis of their suitability, readiness, customer references and market opportunity. These have now worked their way through the programme and are starting to see significant revenue move into the pipeline.

Opening Microsoft UK borders

Microsoft partners face a number of challenges in engagement with Microsoft: knowing who to contact; speaking the right language; understanding the complex incentive system and articulating value to Microsoft. Blackmur says “It became clear to us that, when trying to form useful relationships with Microsoft UK, it is vital to understand the company structure, motivations and business drivers.” She adds: “Giant Step has been invaluable in helping the partners really focus on their value to Microsoft, understanding Microsoft’s strategic targets and helping them establish relationships with the right people.”

Through formalised workshops, consultancy and strategic introductions, Giant Step helped the ISVs build and articulate their value proposition. One of these ISVs was Cinario, a provider of Intelligent Operational Risk Management systems. Its CEO, Charlie Sherlock, recognises the value of Giant Step’s in-depth knowledge: “They really understood Microsoft and knew how things worked. They were able to get us speaking to the right people and telling them the right things. Quite frankly, we couldn’t have done it without them.” He adds: “Giant Step was brought in to accelerate the process of engagement with Microsoft. They acted as a catalyst. They made things happen.”

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Delivering mutual benefit

It was important to the programme’s success that it deliver benefit for both the ISVs and Microsoft. One of the key motivations for Microsoft UK was to fill “white spaces”; finding partners who could address technology or business areas not already covered by UK partners. Another key factor was incremental revenue. Nigel Turner is delighted with the programme’s success: “We are starting to see significant revenue in the pipeline, representing hundreds of thousands of pounds of Microsoft licence revenue in the next 6-18 months.”

These benefits are more than matched by those experienced by the ISVs in question. Cinario’s Charlie Sherlock confirms: “We now have a number of activities underway and are working with the retail account teams on some specific initiatives. We are seeing a positive boost to our revenue stream, with a number of opportunities in the pipeline and due to close in the next 6-18 months. What we’ve achieved in the last couple of months is incredible.”

Valentia Technologies is another partner that has transformed its relationship with Microsoft UK. CEO, Peter Nelson, recognises Giant Step’s input in this success: “We weren’t really aware that there was a process for engaging with Microsoft and certainly wouldn’t have known how to go about it without Giant Step’s support. We had no direct contacts within Microsoft and limited direct exposure to the Microsoft organisation. Giant Step provided stewardship in leading and developing a relationship where strategic marketing efforts could deliver joint success for both Valentia and Microsoft.”

Valentia has been adopted as a key Healthcare partner for Microsoft UK. It is now engaged with a number of UK customers and is in dialogue with other partners from the Microsoft UK channel. Valentia has been sponsored by Microsoft to attend key events and is about to launch joint marketing activity that will see further opportunities move into the pipeline.

A shortcut to success

Judi Blackmur is very clear on the benefit of Giant Step’s involvement in the Open Borders programme: “We could never have achieved this level of success for these Irish software companies without Giant Step’s help. Even with Microsoft UK on side, the complexities of the engagement meant that it would have taken us at least two years to get anywhere near where we are now and I doubt we would have been able to get into the same depth and detail.” She adds: “Having worked with Giant Step on each of the client engagements, we can clearly see the premise of partnering and the discipline that needs to be exercised by the partner in creating mindshare in Microsoft, managing objectives and building relationships.”