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Will Microsoft and Salesforce.com Really Be Partners?

– David Taber, CIO

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What a difference a CEO makes. Can you imagine Steve Ballmer partnering with an upstart that had specifically poked fun at Microsoft while eating its lunch in one of its product areas? Well, Satya Nadella has done just that with Salesforce.com — and in a material way. Kudos to Microsoft.

To be clear, most partnership agreements in enterprise software and software as a service don't matter; almost nothing comes of them over time. I'm not being cynical. Deep software partnerships are hard to do, and the added complexity in both technology and marketing typically increase well beyond what was originally assumed.

[News: [Microsoft, Salesforce.com Link in 'Global, Strategic Partnership'](#)]

[Analysis: [What's Really Behind the Microsoft-Salesforce Deal](#)]

Usually, reality washes away the original optimism within a few months. One telltale sign is the lack of a "next step in the strategy" press release, as the putative partners realize that executing the strategy is an unnatural act. It's rare for the hoped-for features to make it beyond one or two product releases.

When I was a vice president of marketing, I wrote too many press releases based on pure fantasy, designed to attract Wall Street to this week's bright shiny object. These press releases require decryption to separate the "gimmies" and no-ops from the things that matter. (From here on, you'll notice I won't mention several things that were in the release and on the investors' conference call.)

High on Promise, Short on Specifics

Instead, look for promises that serve the business necessity of both parties — where there are unambiguous profit incentives for quick and solid execution.

There was a lot of solidity in the announcements around Salesforce.com's [ExactTarget](#). Microsoft includes bits of ExactTarget in some Office 365 features, while ExactTarget was built upon SQL Server. Moving that technology base over to Oracle would be painful for CRM, so ExactTarget customers now don't have to worry about a destabilizing rewrite. That's good for both companies, so there's little risk in assuming that cooperation will come to fruition. Though there were few specifics about feature evolution (on either the Office365 or ExactTarget front), it's a safe bet that the serious technology cooperation will be limited to those two products.

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For example, the announcement did touch on traditional Office products, which have had a spotty history of integration with CRM. Although it would be nice to have more solid integration with traditional Office (which still represents probably 95 percent of the market), that's not in either company's strategic

interest. Also, it would be nice to have MacOffice integrated on an equal footing — but "nice to have" is the first thing to go when executing software partnerships.

That said, there seems to be some good news for SharePoint users, OneDrive adopters and, most importantly, traditional Outlook clients. It appears that CRM is making improvements and new versions of features in this area. Unfortunately, we'll have to wait for the next round of announcements to get the specifics. That's the way it goes with partnerships in software.

David Taber is the author of the Prentice Hall book, [Salesforce.com Secrets of Success](#), now in its second edition, and is the CEO of [SalesLogistix](#), a certified Salesforce.com consultancy focused on business process improvement through use of CRM systems. SalesLogistix clients are in North America, Europe, Israel and India. Taber has more than 25 years of experience in high tech, including 10 years at the VP level or above.

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