



## WT BUSINESS BEAT

By Nick Wakeman

# 6 secrets to understanding systems integrators

As I said as I opened my session at the immixGroup Federal Sales Summit, I've been covering systems integrators for 18 years. I didn't know what an integrator or SI was in 1996 when I first joined Washington Technology.

I've learned a lot, but even after all this time they can still be somewhat of a mystery.

That's why I was the moderator and not a panelist for my session on cracking the SI code.

My panel had Kanitha Sar, cybersecurity business manager at Leidos; Joshua Canary, account general manager at Computer Sciences Corp.; and Ray Miles, former sales executive at Northrop Grumman and systems integrator alliances manager at immix. The fourth panelist was Scott Lewis, founder of PS Partnership. He's a consultant that helps companies connect with systems integrators. He's also my old boss when he was publisher of Washington Technology.

The questions I asked centered around how to approach SIs, what's the worst approach, what's the best approach, how do you form good partnerships, how do you breakup, and other questions along the lines of how to build strong partnerships.

What follows are six secrets I've drawn from their responses.

### **Secret #1: Know your value**

Being able to explain your value to the SI is paramount. To do this, you have to understand what they are trying to accomplish and how your product or service can help. Does it lower the cost? Does it improve efficiency? Do you have access to an important client?

### **Secret #2: Patience**

Lewis said repeatedly that working with systems integrators isn't a sales process where you'll have measurable results quickly.

Sar and Canary agreed. They and Miles preached patience.

Keep calling, keeping asking questions, keep explaining your value.

### **Secret #3: Relationship building**

There are multiple ways to do this, but it often starts with understanding what your potential partner wants and needs. A great tool is sharing intelligence.

Canary explained technology companies often have better access to government customers than SIs because government officials are more willing to take meetings when it involves conversations around technology and not contracting opportunities.

Coming out of those meetings and sharing what you've learned is a great way to build a relationship.

### **Secret #4: Doing your homework**

This is one of Sar's pet peeves. It quickly becomes obvious when a potential partner hasn't done their research. It's a big turnoff.

There are lots of sources of information, Lewis said, such as Washington Technology, Deltek, and other media. Use LinkedIn. And, of course, Google.

Research an SI just like you would research a potential customer.

### **Secret #5: It depends**

This became a little bit of a joke during the panel because often answers to questions often started with “It depends.”

The answer to almost any question involving SIs can get an “it depends” answer. Sometimes, the answer depends on the company, the customer, the contract, or the technology.

But the answer goes back to understanding the other secrets. You need to do your homework, you need to understand your value proposition, and you need to understand what kind of relationship you have or want to have with the SI.

### **Secret #6: The basics**

Nearly all the secrets come down to mastering the basics of business development and relationship building.

They come across as obvious answers. “Everyone knows to do that.” But from the note taking I saw going on and the packed standing room only, it was obvious to me we all benefit from revisiting the basics.

The risk with the basics is that they are easy to overlook and forget. And when that happens, you end up on the wrong side of a business deal you should have won.

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