

# Establishing Thriving Partnerships



Two companies—Sherlock Systems and HDDS Design—that would normally have considered each other competitors five years ago are now partners. Dave Sallander, president and CEO of Sherlock Systems and Robert Nishida, president and owner of HDDS Design talk about their business relationship and offer advice on getting the most out of partnering opportunities.

## HOW IT ALL BEGAN

“Our partnership with HDDS Design formed at one of the Ingram Micro digital signage workshops. And we both have served on the Ingram Micro digital signage advisory council for the last two years,” says Dave. “From there, we built up a good relationship.”

As a result, Robert brought Sherlock Systems into a recent partnering opportunity. “I have a client who does a lot of digital signage. They needed a new computer vendor,” says Robert. “I could have taken it on and acted as a go-between. But the best thing for my customer was to introduce them to my partners at Sherlock Systems to define their solution.”

## FOUNDATIONS TO PARTNERING

Partnering requires effort to succeed, including identifying and vetting partners and then establishing trust. Robert suggests that partnering begins by looking inward. “Not every small business can do everything. You have to pick your best-of-breed services,” says Robert. “A partnership will help you leverage your capabilities, but you have to partner smart.”

Next, you identify your prospective partners. “I compare partnering to dating,” laughs Dave. “It starts with a phone call, then maybe grabbing a drink to talk things over. Ingram Micro hosts workshops and boot camps, and they’re great places for building new relationships.”

Then determine if the partner shares the same values by doing some homework. “Do the due diligence to find the right partners,” says Dave. “Feel free to talk to Ingram Micro, partner customers and other sources about your potential partners.”

Finally, establish trust by defining the boundaries of the relationship. Keep each other in mind for a future project. Robert recalled an instance where the relationship was so transparent that his customer went directly to Sherlock Systems. “Four months ago, a customer of mine wanted 10-inch touch screens. The customer went to Sherlock Systems and they told them to come back to me,” says Robert. “It goes back to each of us communicating and understanding the boundaries of the relationship.”

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