

Q&A: Chris Ryne

GAP co-founder discusses IT, on-demand training

Compiled by: Brent Hoskins, Office Technology Magazine

Since co-founding Growth Achievement Partners (GAP) in 2010, Chris Ryne has produced a successful record of helping progressive office technology dealerships with establishing, developing, accelerating and maturing their managed IT services businesses through direct consulting, peer group interaction, specialized training, proven tools and MSP M&A services. Previously, he served 10 years at IKON Office Solutions/Ricoh in various sales and area leadership roles.

Recently, Office Technology magazine had the opportunity to interview Ryne about the managed IT services opportunity for dealers and the launch of his new offering, the BTA On-Demand Managed IT Services Workshop.



OT: To what degree do you believe that the BTA Channel has embraced the managed IT opportunity at this point? Is the channel lagging behind where you thought it would be by now?

Ryne: Many dealers have established significant managed IT businesses, and not just when measured against other dealers, but across the entire MSP market. There are dealers who have decided to sit it out or are still on the fence, and plenty of dealers in between. But that could also be said about MPS, digital signage and A/V, security cameras, etc. So, I wouldn't say the channel has lagged in managed IT adoption as there are plenty of dealers who are "in" the business. But the dealers who have waited, or have entered and treated it as just another offering, are lagging behind those who have truly embraced it.

OT: It is often stated that the road to profitability with managed IT is a slow one. Please address what dealers should be considering when facing/understanding this concern?

Ryne: Winning dealers recognize the required investment, particularly in people, and usually ahead of revenue. I

understand the difficulty in this, particularly with economic uncertainty and rising costs. It may seem like a sound strategy to task existing resources with both MFP and managed IT duties. But fractional resources deliver fractional results, and it is typically at the expense of managed IT progress, as the priorities of the traditional business will take precedence. The result is they are slower to gain the confidence, consistency, momentum and, ultimately, revenue and profit that is needed to grow any business, especially one with a recurring revenue model.

OT: What are your thoughts on office technology dealers who are interested, but have not yet proactively pursued the managed IT opportunity?

Ryne: The 2023 version of the BTA Managed IT Services Workshop is now available on demand. In the first recorded session, I address the question of those just getting into managed IT as analogous with deciding you want to race in a NASCAR event. Build, buy or partner for the car? Who is going to drive it? You will need a pit crew with specialists. A pit boss as well. What about someone who understands the rules of NASCAR? How many of those people are already on your team and how many do you have to hire or partner with? Did someone say insurance? And if you do not know much about NASCAR (like me), who are you going to trust to lead this and know he (or she) is doing the right things with your money? The point is, they are behind those who are already "racing." It is moving fast. It is about more than just the car, and it is not enough to just enter the race — you need to win. The BTA On-Demand Managed IT Services Workshop helps dealers of all levels identify and overcome common obstacles and provides guidance to help work through concerns.

OT: What are the primary goals of the workshop in preparing dealerships to move forward

with managed IT services? How prepared will they be to successfully move forward after going through the various on-demand modules?

Ryne: I have been honored to deliver the BTA Managed IT Services Workshop since 2010. From 2010 to 2015, the workshop focused on educating dealers and helping them “get to market.” From 2015 to 2020, the workshop shifted to more “go-to-market” and “take-advantage-of-the-market” strategies as the market grew and matured. At the beginning of 2020, seeing that there were dealers in so many phases of their managed IT journeys, I engineered the content to give guidance, insight and value regardless of where a dealer was on his path, be it just starting out, getting to the next level or improving a mature business in certain key areas.

It is not a “getting started” workshop but, rather, a “fundamentals” course based on 13-plus years of delivering it specifically for BTA dealers. Dealers across all three of those categories have said the approach has been spot on. They also liked the convenience of the remote sessions, the ability to have the entire dealership join, and the access to go back and listen to the recordings and revisit the materials at their own pace. So, for 2023, all six of the sessions have been recorded and the library of supporting materials is accessible on demand, so dealers can affordably get the imaging industry-specific managed IT information they need, when they need it, comprehensively curated all in one place.

OT: What are the dealers who were early adopters — or who have been comparatively more successful — focusing on improving today, or incorporating next?

Ryne: The sales process and the dealers’ particular ideal client profile (and why it works for them) have been well established. They have dedicated managed IT services sales specialists and have allowed them to call on current copier/MFP accounts. They are working on broader list development, vertical specialization, nurturing the ICP targets and hiring dedicated business development reps (BDRs) to own that process.

I am spending a lot of time helping dealers who are filling those roles and want to get them started off right, or helping existing sales staff members improve their skills, processes and tools to level up their results.

Another area is vCIO development. It is such a key role to the success of the program, and refining what they should do and not do, the skills that should be developed, the keys to efficiency and productivity, and lessening stress and burnout are all evolutionary elements of the role. My client

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group is also busy adding tech talent, specializing roles and refining processes to keep up with sales success.

OT: What is your advice to dealers in terms of the acquire/build/partner decisions they must face as they pursue the managed IT services opportunity?

Ryne: They will do all of them. They may not acquire an MSP, but they will acquire talent that is not within the dealership today. They are going to build local competency in areas including service delivery, repeatable processes, knowledge base and documentation, and staff training and development. And they are going to partner (and should!) with many different service providers, distribution partners and cloud/SaaS brokers to support their tech stacks.

OT: How do you characterize traditional managed services providers (MSPs) as compared to office technology dealers? What do you see as the advantage of the dealer channel over the MSP channel?

Ryne: Great question. It is one I talk about frequently with my consulting clients. Nearly 70% of MSPs are under \$5 million in revenue, have fewer than 20 employees and deal mostly in IT hardware and services. Office technology dealerships are typically larger and can handle challenges with greater resiliency, provide more resources, and deliver a more comprehensive set of services that can be sourced, contracted for a monthly payment and supported under one roof. It is a compelling story.

OT: Looking to the future, how commonplace do you believe managed IT services will become as an office technology dealership offering? Will it one day become parallel with or surpass the focus on imaging devices within the typical dealership?

Ryne: I believe the office technology channel will have an adoption rate of more than 50% and, for the typical dealership, no, it will not surpass the focus on imaging — and it does not have to. Even the dealers we talked about earlier who really embrace it are planning for it to represent 30% to 50% of total revenue “in the future,” with some being there today. But I do see the two businesses (imaging and managed IT) being “separated but not siloed” in the dealerships that will have the most success. ■

Brent Hoskins, executive director of the Business Technology Association, is editor of Office Technology magazine. He can be reached at brent@bta.org or (816) 303-4040.