



University Challenge

Editor Ian Hunter has visited the new ScanSource Communications offices in Egham to meet their Training Development Manager Iain Murdoch and to find out more on how the ScanSource University is working for their resellers.

In November last year distributor ScanSource moved to larger offices just around the corner from their old Egham, Surrey base. The new premises at Crabtree Village were chosen and internally designed by ScanSource to meet the needs of a modern distributor and their channel partners and in particular, the need to provide professional training services.

Comms Business Magazine (CBM): The new building is like a breath of fresh air compared to your previous location. How does it measure up for the future and the kind of services you want to deliver to channel partners?

Iain Murdoch (IM): Business has changed significantly in the past 15 years or so when we set up in our old offices. Back then we, along with most distributors of the time, were primarily concerned with logistics – getting the product to the right place and on time. While that remains key of course, towards the end of the nineties, recognising the shift towards voice and data convergence, we expanded those premises to additionally provide resellers with product demonstration and training facilities.

If we look at business today then you could say that most organisations are running the gauntlet of having to 'do more with less'. There has been a lot of 'cloth cutting' to survive and the watchwords are productivity, and efficiency. It is here that today's comms applications can work to achieve these goals for end users.

It is with this in mind that we have constructed within our ScanSource University programme a portfolio of training courses that stretches from the introductory and basic 'speeds and feeds' information needed to get a feel for the product, through to more advanced applications-based courses that can help resellers sell and deploy solutions for their customers.

Here we focus on applications such as Contact Centres, Mobility, and Voice & Data, Messaging and Multi-Site Networking; how to identify the opportunities for these applications and how to sell them through effective positioning, developing the unique solution benefits for individual customers as well as selling against typical competitive products.

CBM: Can you put some numbers on how the training services at ScanSource have expanded over recent time?

IM: Sure. If we look at Avaya solutions training in the UK alone then we have grown the number of different courses we provide from a mere handful to 11 different sales and technical courses. In 2011 we delivered 29 courses throughout the year to around 200 reseller staff. In 2012 we increased that to 65 courses delivered to 470 reseller staff. From a technical training perspective we achieved 300% year-on-year growth.

This is very much a team-based operation with both Kim Jennings' sales people and Technical Support Manager Paul Emery's staff all actively involved in making our channel partners aware of the courses we are able to deliver and the long-term benefits of attending those courses. It is vital that resellers recognise the overall benefits of attending courses and in turn gain the confidence to supply and support the products professionally. It's all about raising the levels of individual competence and promoting self-sufficiency in the channel.

In the case of Avaya, ScanSource is an Avaya Authorised Learning Partner and all of our courses are aligned directly with the needs of their

reseller accreditation programme. Our instructors are Avaya Certified and have instructor mentors at Avaya they work with on a regular basis to ensure they are fully up to date with current developments. Achieving the appropriate levels of vendor certification differentiates the reseller partners in a highly competitive business market.

CBM: Some trainers are just trained to train and have no practical hands on experience to draw upon. If the subject or question is not in the manual then it's not covered on the course so how can ScanSource add value?

IM: I know what you mean and it's no use an instructor just referring a course member to the answer being on page 57 of the manual and leaving it at that. In our case our instructors are very much 'hands on' when they are not in the classroom running a course. Our sales course instructor will be found at the coalface as an Avaya IP Office Pre-sales Support Specialist, bringing his sales force experience and depth of knowledge fully in to play within the classroom setting. Similarly, our IP Office technical course instructor spends his time out of the classroom in the field supporting resellers with deployment of product and application solutions.

CBM: So at the start of 2013 ScanSource finds itself in new premises designed for the delivery of reseller support such as training. What can we expect to see?

IM: Firstly a consistent message and delivery of courses throughout our European operations and secondly ScanSource acting upon the feedback we are receiving from resellers to our survey of the training activities we undertook in 2012. This survey is helping us establish what our partners want to see for the coming year.

One area that is likely to see change is the development and provision of one-day workshops. We know these have proved to be very popular in recent times as resellers seek out the most efficient means of keeping their sales and technical staff up to date with vendor software releases. Each time we announce such a course it 'sells out' very quickly, in one case in just fifteen minutes!

Resellers have told us that they like the blend of being able to take the five-day Avaya Accreditation Course and augment their skills through one day workshops rather than through another, all in one block, second five day course.

We are also very conscious of the turnover in channel reseller personnel; people leave the industry for a number of reasons and are replaced by new team members, many of whom are totally new to the sector. Therefore it is no surprise that our one-day courses 'Introduction to Telecoms' and 'Introduction to Datacomms' are often oversubscribed by new people entering our business.

To sum up, 2013 is going to see ScanSource continuing last year's good work. We'll be providing the opportunities for resellers to update their knowledge, learn the skills they require to serve their customers better and all this in the most convenient manner for them, round the country.

We have new training facilities here in Egham, but we'll continue our roadshows in Scotland and northern England, and our regular webinars will continue to play a role in our overall training portfolio.

