

VARs: Access To HP CEO Hurd Wins More Business

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Hewlett-Packard (NYSE:[HPQ](#)) CEO Mark Hurd has met with more solution providers and more customers in the first half of this year than in all of 2008, according to the vendor. And VARs say their increased access to Hurd has helped win more business.

Denali Advanced Integration, a Redmond, Wash.-based solution provider, closed a \$500,000 deal on the spot after Hurd attended one of Denali's customer roundtables, said John Convery, executive vice president of marketing and vendor relations at Denali.

The solution provider also has more deals in the pipeline that Convery says were helped by Hurd's participation in the event.

"[The \$500,000 customer] was on the fence. It was a decision between [HP] and Cisco. He [Hurd] encouraged the customer to look at [HP's] ProCurve. He also encouraged talk about HP Finance," Convery said. "He took Q&As, took the hard questions and had good, honest answers. Both he and Adrian [Jones, HP's vice president and general manager, Americas Solution Partners Organization] are their best salespeople out in front of customers. They're believable and trustworthy."

Through the first six months of 2009, Hurd and other top-level HP executives have met with more than 300 customers and 100 solution providers, according to HP's Jones. The reason is simple, he said. The meetings work.

HP doesn't disclose the numbers, but the company has metrics in place that prove that getting top-level executives in front of customers and VARs leads to increased sales and more loyal buyers, Jones said.

"We find the [meetings] productive. We get great feedback on things [customers and VARs] want to see from HP and how they continue to get growth. We help solve their problems. Mark is very articulate on HP's overall business, whether it's printers, servers, storage or PCs," Jones said. "It's been a recipe for success the last couple of years and the intensity has just grown from there."

Hurd is not the only CEO willing to meet with customers and partners, of course. Dell (NSDQ:[Dell](#))'s Michael Dell and Symantec's Enrique Salem are a couple of other frequent partner visitors. But HP's decision to increase those visits is no accident, Jones said.

"Mark is pushing us to do more and more of these. And it's not just Mark. We have a whole executive team on a regular schedule with partner and customer roundtables: Todd Bradley [executive vice president, Personal Systems Group], Ann Livermore [executive vice president, Technology Solutions Group], Vyomesh Joshi [executive vice president, [Imaging](#) and Printing Group]," Jones said.

"When Mark looks at his schedule, we try to get every customer meeting we can get. We try to work his schedule. If he's in Dallas or Los Angeles for a meeting, we want to make sure we maximize his time in that territory," he added.

About half of the customers and partners that HP executives meet with already are buying HP. The other half are customers that HP tries to recruit over from competitors, Jones said.

Before a meeting, HP and the partner set expectations and then track results afterward, including the partner sharing sales figures and pipeline, according to HP. The conversation is typically dictated by the customers or partners, depending on areas of interest, Jones said.

"It might be on different products we ship, or what we see going on in the market, technology trends or routes to market. I can't tell you there's one thing we see or hear more from them. Overall, they all want to know how HP can help them grow and be more profitable," Jones said.

Last month, Denali collected 30 customers and prospects for its event, which ranged from enterprise to midmarket and public sector customer segments, Convery said. He said HP approached him about a session with Hurd.

"We're HP's fastest growing partner in the West and an Elite partner across their entire stack. Mark knew of us. We had been at partner roundtables with Adrian and Mark previously," Convery said. "It took me about a half a second to say, 'Absolutely. When can we do it?' "

Denali's roundtable included many customers' officers and principles, a level of executives that don't typically attend an IT vendor event.

"Mark helped us bring in those executives that we don't normally call on every day. And it allowed us to get back with those executives in a follow-up mode," Convery said. "It allows us to get to a C-level executive where the [customer's] IT guy isn't threatened. We can go deeper and talk about the entire portfolio."

During Hurd's hour-long session with Denali's customers, he talked about HP's portfolio, about the company's R&D efforts and about the economy, Convery said.

"[Hurd] said they're spending more money on the ProCurve line than they ever spend on a 'beat Dell' product line," he said.

Denali has maintained a healthy pipeline as a result of the roundtable. The solution provider is usually a services-focused business, but the meeting has led to a "tremendous hardware drag," Convery said.

"We're in a down economy, all vying for every dollar. They want an HP quote. It gives us an opportunity to tell our story," he added.

Future Tech Enterprise, a Holbrook, N.Y.-based solution provider, also hosted Mark Hurd at a recent customer roundtable, one that led to multimillion dollar projects in the company's sales pipeline, according to Future Tech CEO Bob Venero.

"There are large opportunities for which I can give direct correlation to Mark and to the event," Venero said. "Customers were very impressed, very happy. It gave them a better understanding of HP's direction."

Venero also has hosted events with Michael Dell and said the fact that the CEOs are willing to meet with customers shows that they value the channel.

"They're not just figureheads. They're there to help drive, win and grow business on both the partner and customer side," he said. "One day we hope to be able to do that with [IBM (NYSE:[IBM](#)) CEO] Sam Palmisano. That's next on my list."