

F5 Networks Helps Partners Double Business with Integrated CRM/PRM Solution from Salesforce.com



Industry

High-Tech/Software Services

Geographies

Global

Challenges

- ❑ Automate and integrate manual ad hoc partner management process
- ❑ Reduce channel conflict by improving visibility into partner deals and closed business
- ❑ Increase usability of partner program, responsible for 90% of revenues but viewed by partners as unfriendly

Solution

F5 Networks extended its **Salesforce SFA** CRM success by implementing **Salesforce PRM** for channel partners, gaining real-time selling collaboration. Through the completely customizable partner portal, F5 was able to create brand-complaint partner portal Web sites to provide comprehensive tools to channel partners, including deal registration, lead distribution, opportunity collaboration, self-service sales and marketing collateral, and order tracking, making it easy for partners to do business with F5 and increasing selling success.

Results

- ❑ Partner loyalty has increased dramatically
- ❑ F5 has experienced a 300% increase in deal registration
- ❑ Improved visibility to the sales pipeline allows F5 engage earlier and more often in the sales process with partners
- ❑ Top 20 partners have doubled their business in the past year

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— Dean Darwin

Vice President North American Channels, F5 Networks

In 2000, frustrated F5 Networks executives issued a mandate that the sales department needed to put a customer relationship management (CRM) solution in place—and fast. F5’s existing ACT! database failed to accommodate an increase in volume following a surge of enterprise customer opportunities. After evaluating leading CRM vendors, F5 chose salesforce.com, implementing Salesforce on-demand CRM in 30 days to unify detailed customer information across its entire network of global operations. This first move allowed the company to generate snapshots of customer behavior and analyze emerging trends, which let F5 capitalize on its growing stable of enterprise leads. In fact, F5 Network’s CRM implementation proved to be a glowing success in terms of direct sales.

Certain aspects of channel sales, however, could not be addressed using the pure CRM solution.

At F5 Networks, partnering is a way of life. As the leading provider of Internet traffic and content management solutions, F5 Networks generates 90 percent of its sales revenues through channel sales. Although Salesforce CRM improved sales operations with better visibility into partner deals, moving the company light-years from previous ad hoc partner management processes, issues such as channel conflicts and opportunity management continued to undercut the effectiveness of its partner sales efforts. Too many partners competing for the same business created problems within the partner program. In the end, F5’s partner management program, critical to the company’s go-to-market strategy, was not viewed by partners as a friendly system. F5 needed a way to extend its CRM success to partners.

Marrying CRM with PRM

After evaluating several PRM solutions, F5 chose Salesforce PRM, an integrated service that incorporates both CRM and PRM management capabilities for a full view of a company’s business across all sales channels. “This can’t be done without a common program, common database, and common communication path,” says Dean Darwin, vice president North American Channels at F5 Networks. “Salesforce is the only comprehensive soup-to-nuts marriage of CRM and PRM. Salesforce offers a framework that is scalable, with key strategic differentiators over other point solutions that do not offer integrated CRM.”

Building Partner Trust with Deal Registration

Successful partner programs are founded on partner trust. After all, partners are not employees and can choose among competing vendors. F5 built its best-practice deal-registration program with this trust in mind. Deal registrations give partners the opportunity to preserve their value-add on a deal within a business structure where customers might work through one partner such as a value-added reseller (VAR), but then shop the deal around in the end. “You cannot underestimate how hard it is to build trust in this environment,” Darwin says. “With Salesforce PRM, we’ve developed an open and transparent program with an agreed-upon set of rules of engagement and expectation levels, putting us and our partners on an equal playing field, which fosters a significant amount of trust.”

Through Salesforce PRM’s completely customizable and intuitive partner portal, which maintains the brand identity of F5 and is as easy to use as the company’s corporate site, partners can easily register deals and conduct business with F5.

After analyzing the entire channel deal process step by step, F5 developed workflow and automation rules that reduced the deal approval cycle by more than 90 percent. “We have dramatically increased partner loyalty,” says Darwin. “With a 300 percent increase in quarterly deal registrations and increased visibility to the pipeline, we’re in a better position to help partners win deals.”

About F5 Networks

F5 Networks is the global leader in application delivery networking. F5 provides solutions that make applications secure, fast, and available for everyone, helping organizations get the most out of their investment. By adding intelligence and manageability into the network to offload applications, F5 optimizes applications and allows them to work faster and consume fewer resources. F5's extensible architecture intelligently integrates application optimization, protects the application and the network, and delivers application reliability—all on one universal platform. More than 10,000 organizations and service providers worldwide trust F5 to keep their applications running. The company is headquartered in Seattle, Washington, with offices worldwide.

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— Dean Darwin,
Vice President
North American Channels
F5 Networks

For More Information

Contact your account executive to learn how we can help you accelerate your CRM success.

Helping Partners Sell More Effectively

Deal registration was only the beginning of a F5's reinvigorated Partner Lifecycle Management program. Pledging to turn every sales lead over to a partner before offering it to its own sales force, F5 leveraged Salesforce's integrated PRM and CRM capabilities to manage leads across both partners and direct sales. As a result, F5 channel managers can create and distribute leads in Salesforce, which are immediately available to partners through the partner portal. Partners can then accept and update the status of their deals.

F5 also delivers comprehensive tools to its partners through the portal, such as custom pricing information, marketing funds, and marketing collateral—everything partners need to effectively close deals. From an executive management perspective, the portal enables managers at F5's partner companies to log in to view subordinate's deals, giving full visibility to those authorized to view the information.

Closing the partner lifecycle loop, F5 integrated the Salesforce solution with its Oracle Financials system so partners can check on order status after a deal has been finalized. “Now our partners are a part of the business stream,” explains Darwin. “And that lowers everybody's cost of sale.”

F5 had always understood the benefit of using a partner portal, but never had the means to implement it. “Without Salesforce PRM, we would have had to build a custom application from the ground up to enable portals for our products, and we just didn't have the internal resources to do that,” explains Dave Janssen, director of Worldwide Sales Strategy and Operations at F5. “Salesforce PRM has been an enabling mechanism for partner success. We could not have managed a comprehensive channel program without Salesforce PRM.” The company expects its PRM solution to be even more powerful when it adds a custom Distributor module to tie the entire supply chain together.

The Long View: The AppExchange Meets Evolving Needs

The F5 Partner Lifecycle Management program will continue to evolve to meet the needs of F5's partners and will do so by employing a wealth of solutions offered by salesforce.com and the AppExchange. Going forward, the AppExchange will figure prominently into F5's long-term partner strategy. The AppExchange directory allows F5 to pick and choose additional channel-management applications as the company's business needs change. “I look to salesforce.com for domain expertise,” Dean explains. “I have confidence that the AppExchange directory will enable me to outsource my supply chain, add programs as needed, and help me execute at the speed of light.”

The Sweet Smell of Partner Success

The introduction of Salesforce PRM helped F5 achieve its vision of providing a closed-loop system, empowering the company to engage with partners earlier and more often in the sales process. The company is better positioned to help partners address business-use questions, meet challenges, and effectively sell value-added services. At the end of the day, F5 drives tangible benefits for its channels partners. “In concert with F5, we are truly driving opportunities from one single information source,” confirms David Lesser, president and CTO at Nexum, an F5 partner. “We get more leads, more scope, and more support to work the deal and, ultimately, we do more business at a better margin.”

“Quite frankly, I don't think I'd be able to scale my channel program without Salesforce PRM,” Darwin concludes. “With a shortened time to market and decreased cost of sales, Salesforce PRM allows me to grow my channel program organically—so much so that our top 20 partners have doubled their business in the past year.”

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F5_CS_v1 06.2289 08/06

