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Executive Comment: Open communications key to effective global CRM

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In today's economy, OEMs face the challenging task of managing global relationships with distributors, suppliers, and EMS companies. The transition from regional to global management requires more effective customer alignment and closer customer relationships.

To achieve this, OEMs must focus on creating effective organizational teams, solid channel partner relationships, and most importantly, keep open communication with all involved. The following steps are based on the simple premise of listening to the customer to provide them with outstanding support anywhere in the world.

The first step in accepting the challenge of global customer relationship management (CRM) is to understand its complexity. Differences in time zones, cultures, languages, and currencies are just the beginning. Combine these issues with the supply chain dynamics of consignment, build-to-order, and channel management and you begin to grasp the magnitude of this challenge. Focusing on a finite set of customers will enable the

OEM to initially develop a successful model and then build upon it.

The second step to global CRM success is to create a virtual global organization, an account development team that acts as a single entity and whose results are measured worldwide. The global team would work seamlessly to manage design wins, coordinate pricing, product delivery, as well as a global view of customer revenue, issues, and needs. Furthermore, the global team also enables the OEM to provide the customer with a single point of contact who champions all global activities related to that customer.

The third step is for the OEM to establish global relationships with its strategic distributors and EMS partners, franchising them on a global scale to ensure the customer's desire for value-added services is not restricted by geography. Through these partnerships, efficient communication of design wins, pricing, and delivery commitments as determined by the customer will take place. This will enable the product to be delivered to the customer or EMS provider in a timely manner anywhere in the world.

The last and most important step is recognizing that global CRM does not work without outstanding communication. This is an intangible result of successful teamwork, manifesting itself in e-mails, late night conference calls, or global team meetings. The use of Web-based CRM tools hold great promise; however, all tools depend on individual initiative to communicate on both regional and global issues.

While this current model is clearly not for all customers, it does offer potential for any company that plans to design in North America but manufacture overseas. As these companies become larger, they can use the OEM's successful global CRM practice to help them transition from a regional to a global company.

Capturing and managing the voice of a global customer is complex. By developing a better understanding of the issues and focusing the OEM's resources, teams, and channel partners, customers can take the first steps to build a global infrastructure. This infrastructure can deliver the responsiveness and consistency customers require by working in concert with a heightened level of communication.

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