



The Facts about Software Partners

June 2, 2009

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Assumptions that a software partner equates to trained, qualified consultants may be wrong. Consulting companies promote themselves as Microsoft, Oracle, SAP or other software company “partner”. You may see them even refer to being a “Global” partner or “Certified” partner. What does this mean to the buyer looking for professional services related to particular software and what are the things to look out for?

First, most partner programs have specific product/service focus areas or categories in which their partnership relates, which can include education, specific software, infrastructure, or certain types of service (such as security, hosting, or support). Be aware that if a company says they are a partner, their training or experience may be in one particular product or service. For the purposes of this article, I focused largely on the services providers.

Generally speaking, when an organization is a “partner” it does not necessarily mean that they have qualified persons in the product or service you are interested in. Most of the software companies have three main levels such as “partner; “certified partner”, and “gold certified partner”. In some cases, the first level does not have staff competency requirements¹. Some software companies have programs that are nothing more than signing up for a program account and getting access to some materials on their website that could not be accessed without the account. Some have a partner level that requires signing up, applying and obtaining approval for partner status and paying a fee, which grants the partner some benefits, but still do not require that the partner have certain staff competencies in the software products. The higher levels generally require the partner organization to have reached and on an ongoing basis maintain professionals with certain qualifications, which may include certifications. The key here is, as with any professional services, it is the people who obtain the qualifications and therefore, when picking a professional services provider, what matters most. Even when staff competencies are required for an organization to be a certain credentialed partner, the individuals put forward to work on a project for you may not have the credentials.

Software partner arrangements include these types of benefits to the partner in varying degrees depending upon their level and the software company:

- Associating the software brand with the partner
- Access to training that may only be given to customers or partners
- Discounts on training
- Access to online knowledge base or support
- Access to the software company’s support staff
- Free software to develop and demo your solutions
- Access to free software upgrades
- Marketing materials and resources
- Listing as a partner on their website

Some benefits generally reserved for partners with a strong relationship or advanced partnership arrangement include:

- Partner-exclusive advertising and exhibitions
- Access to the software company’s customer base through referrals from the software company
- Access to the software company’s customer base through participation in strategic programs to jointly market and sponsor events

Below summarizes the partner programs of three of the major software companies with respect to professional services.

ORACLE

Partnership Level	Description per the Software Company	Fee paid by Partner	Required staff competencies ¹
PARTNER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to develop, resell, integrate, or provide services for all of Oracle's products • Benefits spanning entire lifecycle: development, education, marketing, sales, and support 	Yes	No
CERTIFIED PARTNER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop specialization and brand your expertise in the market • Accelerate adoption and go to market through enhanced benefits, resources, enablement, marketing, and sales engagement 	Yes	Yes
CERTIFIED ADVANTAGE PARTNER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highest level of specialized resources, engagement, and dedicated account management • Exclusive opportunities to connect with prospects, reach target industries/ untapped markets 	Yes	Yes

MICROSOFT

Partnership Level	Description per the Software Company	Fee paid by Partner	Required staff competencies ¹
Registered Member	Registered Members are partners with any level of expertise in Microsoft technologies who are interested in accessing resources and aligning themselves more closely with Microsoft. Becoming a Registered Member is free, and enrollment only takes a few minutes.	No	No
Certified Partner	Certified Partners demonstrate a high degree of competence in working with Microsoft technologies. At this level, Microsoft helps your business succeed by offering you Telephone-Based Account Engagement, the Microsoft Certified Partner logo, free software licenses, and much more.	Yes	Yes
Gold Certified Partner	Gold Certified Partners demonstrate the highest degree of competence in working with Microsoft technologies. At this level, you have the opportunity to build the closest working relationship with Microsoft, and receive premier benefits such as personalized account engagement, the Microsoft Gold Certified Partner logo, priority listing in Microsoft directories, and free software licenses.	Yes	Yes

SAP

Partnership Level	Description per the Software Company	Fee paid by Partner	Required staff competencies ¹
SAP Partner	Smaller companies that focus on local markets, specific industries, or specific SAP products.	Yes	Yes
SAP Alliance Partner	Consultants that offer comprehensive services to key SAP accounts in a particular market. Alliance partners work closely with SAP to develop local markets and to deliver services. Participation at this level is by invitation only and requires a sufficient number of certified consultants.	Yes	Yes
SAP Global Partner	Companies that deliver comprehensive services that cover at least two regions, including Europe and North America.	Yes	Yes
SAP PartnerEdge™ Services Partner	The SAP PartnerEdge program is available to all services partners. Through SAP PartnerEdge, a partner can improve their access to SAP product, marketing and training information and collaborate on goals.	Yes	Yes

¹ Required staff competencies means training, experience and/or certification in related products.

The most important question to answer when selecting a service provider is: What is the experience and expertise most relevant for the service I require? If you are in the process of selecting a software product, keep in mind that a service provider who is a partner to a software company may be biased toward recommending that product

because they resell, or get a referral fee, or would prefer to provide services related to that product. If you are looking for a consultant to help resolve issues that you are having and it's unclear whether its software issues or process issues, consider that some software consultants may be experienced implementing a product but not how the process works that the software supports.

Questions to ask a company who says they are a partner:

- How long have you been a partner?
- Which specific products or services are you certified or have qualifications in?
- How many people do you have who are certified or have qualifications in the product?
- Who would work on my project and what are their qualifications (training and experience) in the product?
- What is your experience with ____ process? (the business process that the software is supporting)

The top things to remember:

1. If they are not a "Certified" partner, they are not necessarily required to have any qualifications in the product.
2. Ask for specific qualifications of the individual persons who would work on your project before you engage a consultant.

About Sanders Consulting, LLC

Sanders Consulting, LLC (SC) is a professional services firm focused on finance and accounting business advisory services to middle-market companies. SC provides services through a high level of experience and expertise with the unique combination of CPA, business and technology skills. The goal of SC is to turn your strategy into results.

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