



A whole new (small business) world

Small- and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) are overwhelmed by irrelevant offerings, providing an opportunity to redefine the CSP (communications service providers)/SMB relationship. By leveraging trust and understanding to make their offerings simpler, more tailored and relevant, CSPs can shift from service provider to growth partner and build longer, more valuable relationships.

What's going on

Being a small- or medium-sized business (SMB) has never been easy. While SMBs represent more than 90% of businesses, many struggle to compete in a world dictated by big business.¹ And in today's new normal, the ability to survive—let alone thrive—is tougher than ever.

Since the onset of COVID-19, 60% of SMBs have experienced sales decline.² With the acceleration towards digitization, many have had to find new ways of working and doing business.

SMBs are bakers, lawyers, builders—they have a craft. They are not IT experts, so they need help with understanding and using services to support their businesses such as digital marketing, security and cloud to name a few. SMBs can, therefore, be overwhelmed by the irrelevant offerings and the complexity of choosing the right mix of solutions and vendors.



Communications - A whole new (small business) world

CSPs have the opportunity to help them not just survive but to thrive. They can do this by eliminating generic, one-size-fits-all DIY marketplaces and by providing SMBs with much more tailored and personal experiences and support—how, where and when they need it most.

Get this right and CSPs can help SMBs focus on what they do best.

Competition is fierce with Big Tech encroaching. Amazon and Google offer a range of ICT solutions, for example. Meanwhile, some banks are making moves into the ICT space with smart partnerships leveraging open banking technology.

Starling Bank is now offering Cloud Cyber Security and business communication tools.³

The unique advantage CSPs have is renewed trust, however. SMBs trust CSPs, and this trust has been further deepened by the pandemic.⁴ CSPs have built an understanding of SMBs and their needs through years of serving them, creating customer intimacy and the sense of being part of the community.

Now, they need to use their omnichannel presence and the insights they already have to design and deliver a more relevant, intuitive and effective experience to SMBs.

Moving from selling connectivity to partnering as problem-solvers (becoming a one-stop shop/marketplace/business advisor) is a fundamental shift in the way CSPs do business. By pivoting in this way, they will build long-lasting and valuable relationships.

CSPs have every opportunity to set a bold ambition to redefine their relationships with SMBs. They need to take the lead and shift from selling “commoditized” products and services to becoming a true growth partner to small and medium businesses.



What's next

Today, SMBs are facing a once-in-a-generation crisis. For some, the goal is to survive; for others, it is to thrive. All are an opportunity for CSPs.

If CSPs leverage their infrastructure, partner ecosystem, customer intimacy and brand equity, they have the chance to completely reimagine the end-to-end experience SMBs currently have with their connectivity and IT providers.

CSPs can capitalize on their desire to become tech companies while maintaining a human and customer centric approach to achieve greater success. To be a great digital growth partner to SMBs, they will need to leverage their human capital to drive efficiencies, build relationships and support individual growth.

Opportunities for reimagination

1. Do take it personally

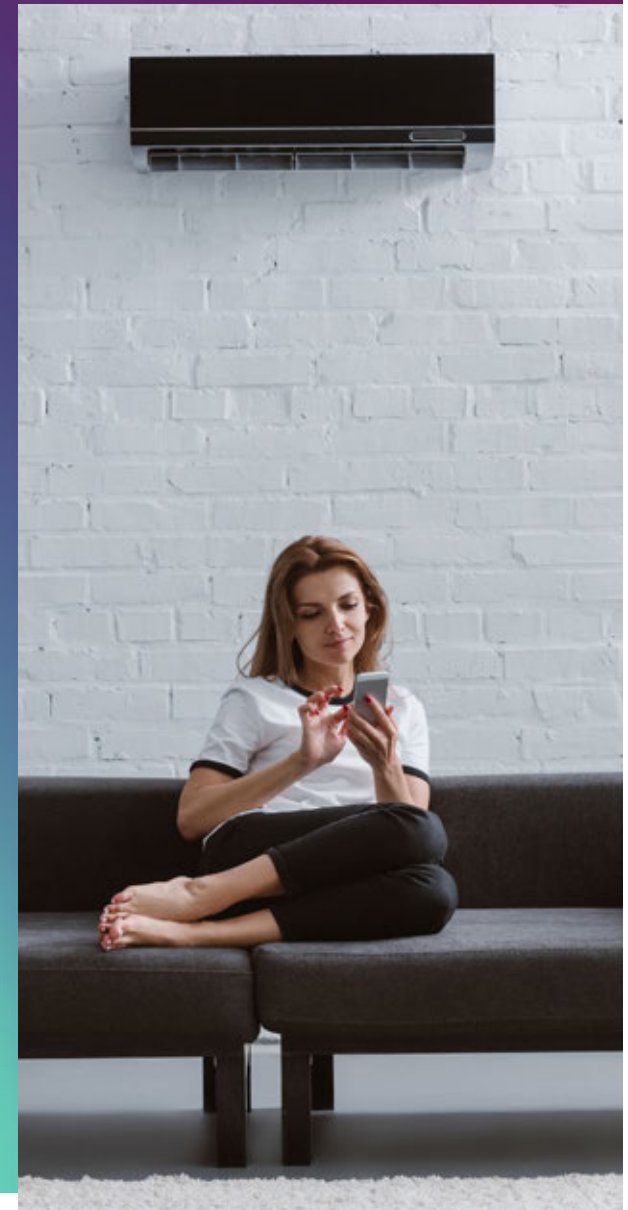
SMBs need to know that they are choosing the right options for their business, so CSPs will need to proactively provide tailored solutions to help SMBs achieve their goals.

SMBs also need to trust that they are receiving the best advice for their business. They are calling out for personalized advice and help to navigate transitions. Modular and interactive assets that are contextualized by industry could support such an haute couture-style of offering. CSPs could also leverage scale across multiple businesses to gain buying power, manage SMB costs and supplement support.

A good example is Enel X, part of the Italian energy services company that aims to revolutionize SMBs' approach to business development. To achieve this goal, it launched a new platform to enable a new ecosystem specially designed for this initiative. Its solution supports SMBs to obtain liquidity, reduce financing costs and digitalize business processes.⁵

Removing potential financial headaches or worries allows the SMBs to focus on their craft.

Tailoring must go hand in hand with simplicity, however. SMBs seek simple and clear information on products and business benefits. Few have much time to evaluate the merits of various product offerings. They need jargon-free information, transparent pricing with cost vs benefits, product comparison and a clear view of how offerings will help them meet their business objectives.



Another inspiring example is Lemonade, an AI-powered insurance company which launched the world's first open-sourced insurance policy, which sets a good example for providing clarity on complex offerings. By opening the policy for editing from the wisdom of the crowd, it has turned the traditional way of crafting an insurance policy on its head. Its goal is to make insurance "simple, fair and approachable to everyone."⁶

2. The human touch

SMBs want all interactions to feel human and personal. They also want to have confidence that their needs are understood and that interactions are proactive and adaptable.

They seek simple and clear information on products and business benefits to help them make the right decisions for their business. They don't want to waste time evaluating options and they want to trust that they have the information they need to make decisions.

CSPs must ensure product information is not too technical or jargon-heavy. It should give a clear view of business implications and it should be easy to navigate—by providing a roadmap showing installation and training timelines for different new digital products, for example, to help the SMB easily choose

what's best for their business. SMBs want continuity in the support they receive throughout their contract lifecycle via a single point of contact that is approachable, rather than just support as a new acquisition or when they are up for renewal.

They also want a partner who knows their business and is freed from restrictive sales targets to focus on customers' business goals. And they need honest and unbiased advice and a view of what they have and where their market is going.

CSPs can meet all these needs by leveraging their scaled human capital. If they retrain their extensive retail, support and field forces to become SMB growth partners, they can be a helping hand to them and provide competitive advantage.

A do-it-for-me approach—outsourcing CTO or CIO functions, perhaps—will give precious time back to an SMB to focus on their business. As an SMB's growth partner, a CSP can help and support in an outcome-based, personalized way. Frictionless and flexible support during installation and integration, including training for users and a focus on driving efficiencies, is vital.⁷

Habito is an example on how to do this exceptionally well, providing an all-

round house buying service, advising on negotiations, and taking on the paperwork. The introduction of a 24/7 chatbot and extensive online services means that you can have personalized support when you need it, reducing the hassle.⁸

Another example is WeChat, which offers such facilitation by being a one-stop shop for its users, which it allows an end-to-end transaction—from payments to booking flights and hotels—directly using the WeChat app. Companies can also launch apps within WeChat, allowing businesses to reach their users directly.⁹



3. Boundaryless partners

Much focus is on digital—and rightly so. Yet despite this, there's also a need for physical experiences and/or flexibility that will place a premium on them as we move out of the pandemic.¹⁰

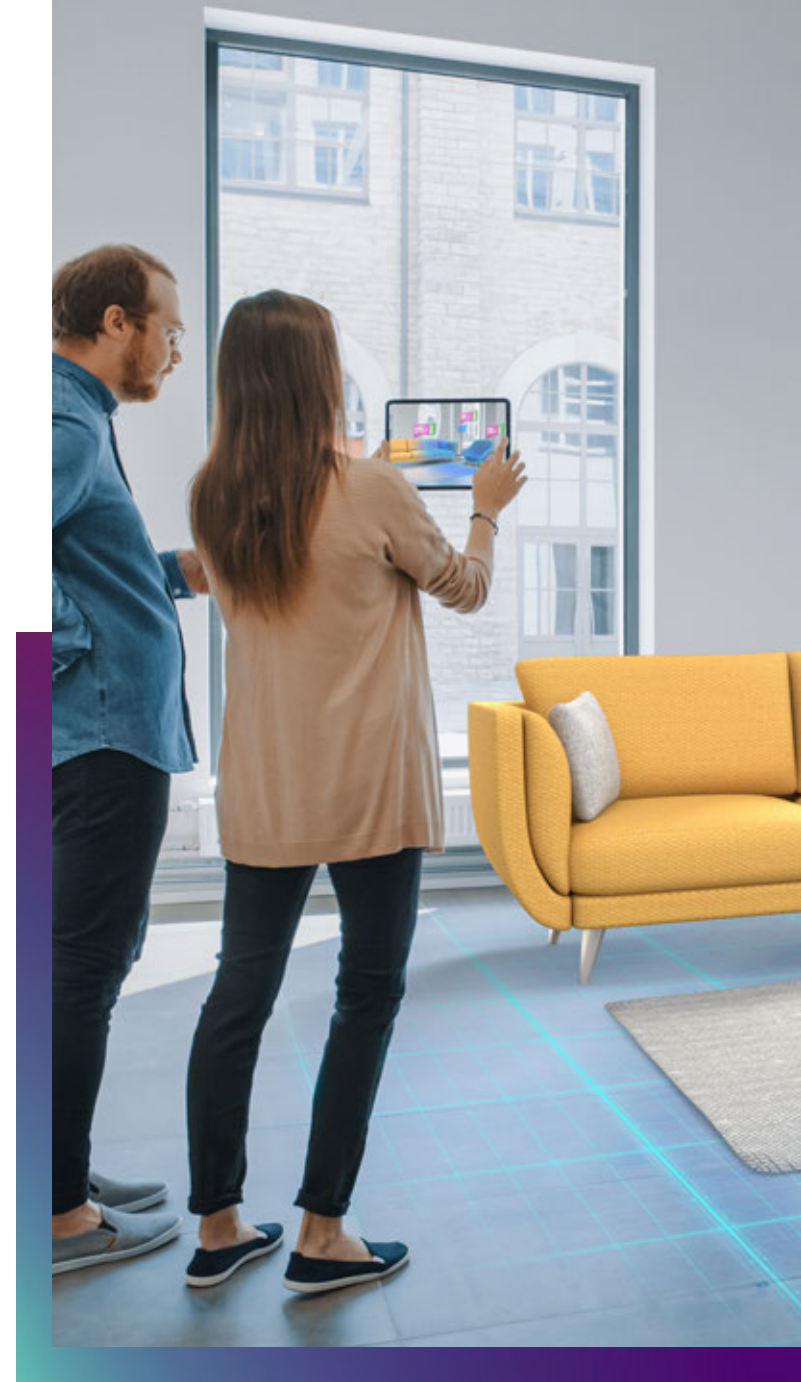
CSPs have an established brick-and-mortar footprint in communities that can be leveraged to connect with SMBs for local touchpoints, and to provide the face-to-face interaction that existing Big Tech companies are missing.

CSPs are ideally placed to cater to SMBs' needs across the multiple channels they already use to service them—website, app, webchat, in-store retail space or even using their scaled human capital as growth partners—and provide frictionless, flexible support options.

At some point, SMBs will need somewhere to be physically with employees or customers—to provide retail advice, for example. Office-space-as-a-service will provide an opportunity to create new experience.

By repurposing their shop floors for customer interactions, training and team engagement days, CSPs can use their own space to provide SMBs with an office anywhere. By leveraging the idea of the boundaryless office, they can get to know SMBs better and have regular check-ins as their growth partners.¹¹

A CSP growth partner can also enable a community—such as by facilitating a live network providing start-ups with advice from established SMBs via peer-to-peer support within their own industry. Alternatively, it could connect local businesses with local customers—becoming a hero in the ever-popular support local movement, for example, and in turn building deeper relationships.



What CSP leaders can do

1. Personalize your approach to SMBs

Treat SMBs as individual businesses, not a homogenous group.

Be the provider to support them with their growing pains rather than simply offering generic products or information. Speak to them in a language they understand—business outcomes and goals rather than tech jargon.

2. Build longer-term relationships

Use your immense human capital to shift from being a current service provider to building long-lasting and valuable relationships. Maintain a human approach mindset as you continue your digital transformation to be their growth partner. Be ambitious in defining what a do-it-for-me approach could offer businesses.

3. Leverage your assets

Use all your channels including your vast retail space to support SMBs wherever, whenever and however they need it—for example, by providing anything from one-to-one care by specialist account managers to easily accessible insight and sector expertise, or repurposing retail spaces for community-based services and flexible workspaces.

Creating an office anywhere can build a connection with the community, a place to use for business and connect with others. Bringing human experience to digital offerings will prove to be a real differentiator.



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