

THE TOTAL SOLUTION ECOSYSTEM™



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People do not want products or services – they want results. One of the biggest challenges businesses face when they [go-to-market](#) is how to identify and communicate the meaningful, compelling result they provide. The reasons companies face this problem are numerous and I've written about many of them in previous articles, as well as on [thefastgrowthblog.com](#). They range from a total lack of understanding of their customer to not having the confidence to [make a compelling promise](#) – and everything in between.

Recently I witnessed another major cause of the problem. This situation is most prevalent in a business-to-business or business-to-government environment, though it comes into play in the business-to-consumer market as well. Frequently an offering only provides a part of the 'total solution' that is required to fulfill the promise a company makes to its clients or prospects. In marketing circles, this is called a 'partial solution.' It is rare that a company provides a true, 'total solution'. As a result, it is critical that those companies do an exceptional job of marketing and selling their partial solution.

In this issue of The INTELLIGENT GROWTH Ezine, I will enable you to understand how to identify whether you provide a 'partial solution' or 'total solution', what that discovery means to your [go-to-market](#) efforts, and the actions you must take to accelerate your growth as a result. I call this *The Total Solution Ecosystem*™. The concept, while

strategic in nature, is critical to the successful implementation of any marketing or sales effort. The failure to understand this concept can stunt the growth of an otherwise successful company.

WHAT CLIENTS WANT

In a [previous article](#), I wrote that all clients want the same thing – a remarkable client experience. I define that as giving clients what they want, when they want, how they want; preferably without having to ask for it. Clients want results; they don't want products, services or even experiences. They don't want to think. Unfortunately, most company's messaging and sales strategies force prospects to do exactly that – to think about how an offering can help them and then translate what a seller is telling them into information they can act upon.

This means, that as a seller the more 'thinking' you can do for your clients and prospects the simpler you can make your offering. By simplifying your offering and making it easier to understand exactly what you will do for them them, you create more value for your clients. In contrast, when you make clients and prospects think about your offering, you reduce your value and ultimately [commoditize](#) yourself.

The challenge with giving, or promising clients the results they want in a simple format, is that solutions are rarely simple and it is not often that one company can provide everything that is necessary to solve a problem. An advertising agency, for example, is in the business of helping a company grow revenues by attracting new clients. The agency, however, does not offer the 'total solution'. A company's strategy, sales team, product development team, etc. are all going to have a more direct and dramatic impact on whether a company will grow. The agency, in this sense, provides a 'partial solution.'

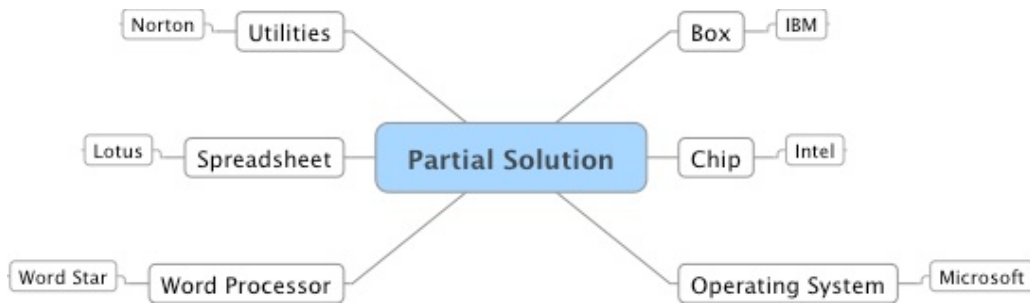
THE SOLUTION LANDSCAPE

The term solution has always bothered me. Too often, solution is merely a synonym for product or service. Remember, if there is not a problem there can be no solution. People want to get rid of problems and they don't much care how they get rid of them (so long as it is legal, ethical, affordable and preferably not fattening).

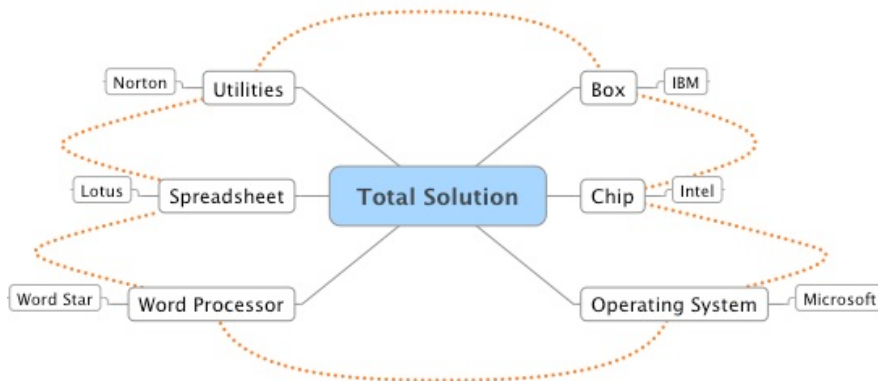
That said, solutions come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Strategically you need to make one determination and that is whether you are a 'total solution provider' or a 'partial solution provider'. Simply put:

- Total Solution Provider: Your company provides everything necessary to support the promise that you make.
- Partial Solution Provider: Your company does not provide everything necessary to support the promise that you make. Your company, therefore, relies on other components, outside of your control, to deliver your promise. To provide a 'total solution' your offering must interface with other offerings (from other companies) and/or functions (within your client company).

A perfect example and illustration of 'total solution' and 'partial solution' is to look at the history of the personal computer business. When the PC industry first became a part of mainstream markets, a 'total computer solution' was actually the combination of several 'partial solutions' (see figure below).



The ‘computer industry’ was actually the combination of (at least) six different industries. Now think about it. What would the value of any individual component be without the other components? Even if you combine several of the pieces – say the box, the chip and the operating system – the value is still virtually nothing. To become a viable offering, each ‘partial solution’ had to work together, in some fashion, to create a total solution (see figure below).



To succeed, each company (and, in essence, each industry) had to understand how it fit into the ‘total solution’. This is what I mean by *The Total Solution Ecosystem*. The companies that were the most successful at every step along the way were the ones that worked, both with their client and the other companies involved, to be certain they provided a total solution.

WHICH ARE YOU

Determining whether you are a ‘total solution’ or ‘partial solution’ is a critical distinction that will affect how you formulate your growth strategy and go-to-market tactics. You cannot position your company, your offering or your actions effectively if you are not clear where you stand.

As you make this determination for your company, keep in mind that one choice is not necessarily better than the other. Both have advantages and challenges.

Total solution	
Advantages	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greater control• Greater value-add opportunity• Easier integration• Opportunity to make a bigger, clearer promise	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More susceptible to market moves• More complex client engagement• Fewer alliance opportunity• Bigger threat in market
Partial Solution	
Advantages	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Simpler offering• Greater opportunity for market cooperation• Greater flexibility• Specialization	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Integration• Complexity of message• Less control

Regardless of whether yours is a ‘partial solution’ or ‘total solution’, your [brand promise](#) must focus on the total solution. This is a relatively new phenomenon. In Industrial-Age marketing you did not need to do this – it was enough to merely do what you did well. However, as markets have become increasingly [commoditized](#), it is no longer enough.

For example, in the financial services industry, ‘financial advisors’ traditionally provided a ‘partial solution’. They offered investment or insurance advice. Accountants provided tax advice. Lawyers provided legal advice. And so on. This led to increased complexity for all of the players (buyers and sellers); and as advisors tried to differentiate themselves from their competition they began to offer coordinated services. They did this in a variety of ways. Some created alliances among the different specialties, while others attempted to create ‘total solutions’ themselves.

Microsoft followed the latter path in its efforts to grow. As the company began dominating operating systems, they introduced other software in the area of productivity tools (word processors, spreadsheets, etc.). Through this transition, Microsoft served as everything from a partner to a key competitor. Eventually even taking over most of the utilities originally provided by firms such as Symantec. I am convinced that one of the reasons Microsoft has been so successful is based on their superior understanding of *The Total Solution Ecosystem* concept.

ACTIONS YOU MUST TAKE

Once you have determined if you are a ‘partial solution provider’ or ‘total solution provider’, you must choose the appropriate strategic approach. Most companies end up determining that they provide a ‘partial solution’. Let me re-emphasize that there is absolutely nothing wrong with being a ‘partial solution provider’ as long as you understand and embrace what you are., Remember, serving as a ‘partial solution provider’ is always going to be a simpler approach than serving as a ‘total solution provider’.

That said, if you decide that you have a ‘partial solution’, you must choose one of two paths:

A) Embrace your ‘partial solution’ status and begin to understand the ecosystem that enables your customers to get the ‘total solution’. Design chart similar to the ones above that show all the parts of the solution. Make sure that you understand The Ecosystem as well as you would if you provided the total solution.

Next, determine if you want to take the lead role with your clients and prospects in achieving the solution. There are certainly advantages to taking the lead role as it gives you more control of your destiny. You do not need to be the biggest piece of the solution to take the lead role, though the greater the impact your role has, the easier it is to take the lead. If you decide to take a secondary role, it is critical that you develop influencer relationships with other providers in the ecosystem.

In either case, whether you take the lead or a secondary role, it is important to develop effective business-to-business relationships with the other providers.

B) Your second option is to become a ‘total solution provider’. This does not mean that you should not develop relationships with other providers, but it does mean that you must understand that there will be competitive aspects to that relationship.

Should you decide to become the ‘total solution’, or if you’ve already determined that you provide the ‘total solution’, it is also helpful to determine what part your solution plays in achieving a client’s ultimate objective. For example, you may determine that you provide the ‘total solution’ for tech-

nology, but your technology solution is only a part of a client's productivity solution.

A FINAL NOTE

The purpose of this article was to introduce you to the concept of 'total solutions' vs. 'partial solutions'. This determination, and the actions that you take as a result of it, are all critical to the long-term viability of your positioning strategy.

The story does not end with the decision about which solution you provide – this critical decision is only the beginning. If you'd like some assistance implementing growth strategies based on the ideas presented in this article, we are here to help. Just call or e-mail and we'll set up a free, no-obligation assessment to determine whether you offer a 'total solution' or 'partial solution' and how you can leverage that positioning to achieve more profitable growth.