



# Technology Services Focused

## TAG hosts convention with 'company culture' theme

by: Brent Hoskins, Office Technology Magazine

**T**echnology Assurance Group (TAG) hosted its 19th Annual Convention April 7-10 at the Rosen Plaza hotel in Orlando, Florida. The event centered on providing educational and networking opportunities to TAG's members — managed technology services providers (MTSPs), representing \$400 million in products and services annually in 136 markets. The convention, themed "Igniting Your Company Culture," also featured the products and services of a number of exhibitors — TAG's strategic partners, including companies familiar to BTA Channel dealers such as Continuum and Tigerpaw Software.

What is TAG? "We are a training, education and consulting company for companies [MTSPs] that sell technology," said Brian Suerth, TAG president, in an interview with Office Technology during the convention. "Our whole role in life is to increase our members' profits and sales. We've been around since 1998 helping organizations — whether they're in office equipment, IT or voice — to make the transition into new technologies profitably."

Citing the addition of managed IT services as an example, TAG provides the "game plan for how you build it, price it, sell it, market it and onboard customers," Suerth said. He noted that TAG offers such resources as sales training that achieves an 85% close ratio, financial analysis and benchmarking, onboarding and customer management, marketing and lead generation, and hiring assistance.

As noted, the theme of this year's convention was company culture, which was also the focus of two of the keynote sessions. "If our members can take at least one thing from this convention that will change the culture of their companies, then that's success," Suerth told Office Technology. "That gives each of them the opportunity to reevaluate a specific topic about his or her organization, putting it at the forefront."

Suerth set the stage for the convention's theme, presenting on company culture during the opening awards banquet. "Culture is so very important to the success of our organizations, because it impacts so many things," he said. "Culture impacts our competitiveness, the experience we're trying to deliver to



*Brian Suerth*



*Lane Smith*

our customers, our brand, the story that our brand is trying to tell to our marketplace, innovation, and our employees' abilities to think creatively, productively and profitably."

Culture is the "intangible glue that holds all the pieces of the company together," Suerth said, challenging attendees to consider how culture is viewed within their companies. "What are the top three words that come to mind to describe the culture of your company? What if I asked your employee? How would they describe the culture of your company? It is in alignment with your three words or is it out of alignment?"

In addition to sessions emphasizing company culture, the agenda featured three breakout sessions focused on effective MTSP business practices. Among them was "Keys to Success When Launching a New Service Offering," led by Lane Smith, TAG's vice president of member advancement. Smith recently joined TAG after serving at Continuum as senior director of partner enablement.

In his presentation, Smith spoke of some of his own experiences with launching new services, acknowledging that his first experience resulted in "total failure." Over time, he said, he learned that it is important to have everyone involved on the same page, with a process in place. "When you're launching a service, you've got to come up with a clearly defined process that is repeatable," he said, noting that it is akin to having a sales process in place, which can be improved if it becomes ineffective. "If you have no process [with the launch of a new service], how are you going to improve it?"

Smith listed and explained the components of a process for the successful launch of any new service. Among them: executive buy-in; packaging and pricing; structuring a playbook so that all sales and post-sales employees are fully aware, for example, of the steps to follow, as well as the tools they will need and have available to them to sell and support the new service; team training; and a go-to-market strategy.

Looking at the go-to-market strategy in particular, Smith recommended MTSPs start with a "pilot" customer when adding any new service. "Everybody has 'friendly customers' that you can sell to, pretty much because you recommend it," he said. "Give them a discount if you need to, but use them as your first launch to make sure you are getting everything done. Then, most importantly, use them as a testimonial; get a case study out on them." ■

*Brent Hoskins, executive director of the Business Technology Association, is editor of Office Technology magazine. He can be reached at [brent@bta.org](mailto:brent@bta.org) or (816) 303-4040.*