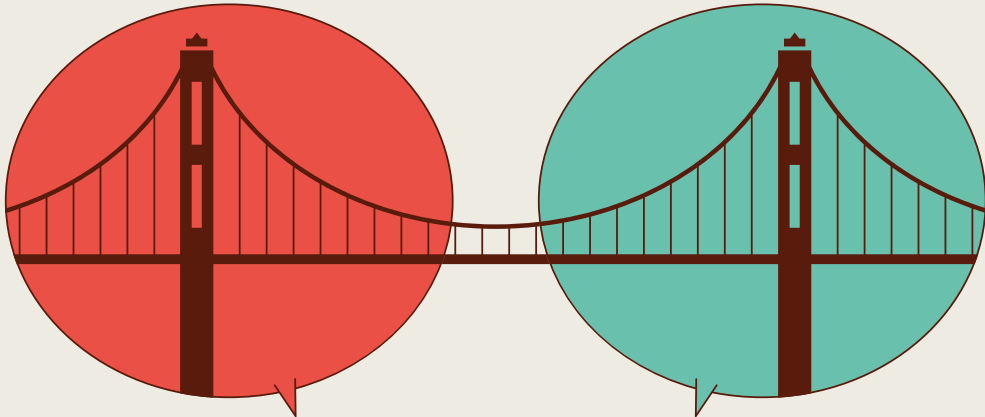
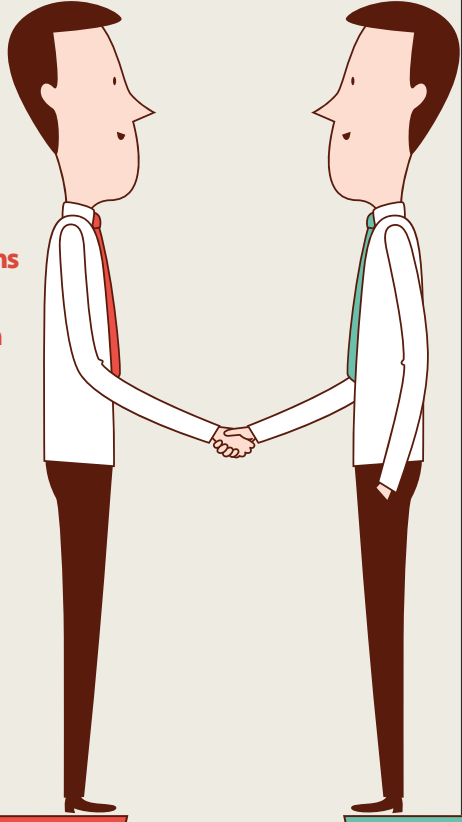


VALUE-ADDED DISTRIBUTORS – A TECHNOLOGICAL BRIDGE ACROSS THE INDUSTRY



a&s spoke with Mehdi Moukrite, CEO of Melint, a value-added distributor in the Middle East to hear more about the role value-added distributors play as a bridge between manufacturers, systems integrators, and end users, and how the industry as a whole can benefit from more involvement from channel players.



BY Israel Gogol, Freelancer

As the security industry is shifting to a more solutions-oriented environment, channel players such as distributors and re-sellers have more and more opportunities to bring added value to their clients by creating customized solutions, localizing their offerings and fine-tuning solutions to customer needs. Melint is a value-added distributor of brands such as Aimetis, FLIR, VIVOTEK, Comnet, Rasient, Gallagher, and others. The company's geographic focus is Africa and the Middle East, and it manages its operations from two regional offices, Dubai that handles requests for Middle East and Eastern Africa, and Casablanca, Morocco, which handles North Africa and Western Africa (French-speaking countries). It also operates a sister company based in Canada which is in charge of the company's R&D.



Mehdi Moukrite, CEO, Melint

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Q: AS A VALUE-ADDED DISTRIBUTOR, WHO ARE THE STAKEHOLDERS YOU INTERACT WITH THE MOST?

A Melint is at the crossroads of the stakeholders of each security project. Even if our direct customer (billed customer) is always the systems integrator, we often have to deal with the end users and their consultants, other suppliers, and also the vendors at the same time. We are often asked to be committed to each of these stakeholders. The reason for this is the fact that, as a distributor, we carry the flagship of the brands we represent. Players in the market deal with us not only as a “box mover,” but essentially as the representative of the brand including the knowledge and the special competencies in the specific brands field of expertise.

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Q: WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE BIGGEST CONTRIBUTION VALUE-ADDED DISTRIBUTORS “BRING TO THE TABLE” FOR THEIR CLIENTS?

A The biggest contribution for our company is always the “added value” provided by our technical team, whether in pre-sales or after sales.

Let's take an example of securing an airport or an industrial plant or a city; even if we can use the same brands of cameras or VMS or storage, the project won't be executed the same way, with the same settings nor the same references. Our added value is to bring the best practices for each type of project. These best practices are coming from our experience as a distributor in the middle of all the players. We learn a lot from this position. And the more projects are successful, the more the decision makers want to rely also on the distributor as part of the project planning. Systems integrators are also very comfortable with the added value we provide because they can add it to their own expertise and make their offer much more valuable to the end user. Most of the customers, the systems integrators, are very faithful to us because we established a way of working not based on a price list but on permanent skills and competence sharing. Our pre-sales team is trained in a way to think project and not price only.

From our position, we are often required to be the bridge between vendors of brands we represent to create more added value in the features of the mixed products to reach the level of a global solution, and not only separated products.

We even had to invest on a small development team to make the process easier and the time to market faster for all the stakeholders.

Melint as an value-added distributor is consequently very involved in the technical life of each product. And this position brings us also to be aware of how the product is manufactured and developed. In some projects, we had to review the design of existing products in accordance with the manufacturer, and came up with a brand new product totally different but answering to the needs of the market. Our review can be made on the electronic level but also on the software level. And sometimes, in accordance with our partners, we create a new part number for this product or even we brand it in a way to not disturb the manufacturer strategy on the worldwide level. What's most important for us is to strengthen the relations with the manufacturers and the systems integrators at the same time, and the only way to do it is to be a “technological bridge” between them.

We experienced this for a bank project in North Africa where it was needed to create a new product of access control in partnership with our supplier, totally re-designed with us, and now it became a daily sales item for daily projects. Without this re-design, we may have missed the opportunity to create this product in which now we see a huge potential.

Q:SO HOW DO YOU BALANCE BETWEEN DEVELOPING A FOCUSED EXPERTISE AND THE NEED TO CARRY MANY BRANDS?

A You are totally right. **This is the main challenge an added-value distributor faces because of this position to be an expert on each represented brand, and expertise comes only when focusing on the same product in various project environments. For that reason our choice has been to focus on only one brand at the time for each business unit type. It's like having many small companies in one, with one main back office where we share common resources.**

The mistake is to try to sell the same product with the same expertise to all the projects. For example we carry camera brands for high-security projects and we push them like our own flagship, but for small-sized project at the distribution level we provide OEM cameras with much less features making the difference obvious to the decision maker.

This helps also the big name brands to keep their position recognized by the market. We apply the same thinking for almost all the security products we handle, including accessories, storage, network, and servers.

The key point here is to invest in a sales team able to understand the differences between projects and not mix quotes between all the customers on a basis of a global price list. That is why I mentioned earlier that we don't provide price list to our customers but always answer on a project base.

Our suppliers are also very happy with this situation because we don't create competition inside our catalog for their products. This allows them also to focus on helping us increase our expertise.

Q:WHAT WOULD YOU SAY ARE YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGES IN BEING A VALUE-ADDED DISTRIBUTOR?

A Our main challenge is the pure distribution channel, the one called the "box movers." We have the same label: "DISTRIBUTOR," but we don't do our business the same way. A box mover will quote on a price list base. Our company will quote on a base of project success chances.

That's the main difference with box movers who most of the time are more playing the role of a financial bridge and not a technological bridge. If pure distributors have access to the same products as us, this kills the added value, and companies like us will move away from such a product line because of it. This is very important. It's a long-term strategy we want to set up with our vendor partners.

The best example is the industry of storage or servers: the big name vendors are used to working with famous worldwide distributors, which are more known to be 'box movers' than solution-oriented. In this case, when we face a project where it's needed to use such products we face a big challenge to convince them to bring their added value in the project. They will quote us only the servers in the price list available from the vendor but not the product that can fit the best to the project. This situation is very common in many video surveillance projects where the part of servers and storage is very high.

Q:HOW MUCH DO YOU RELY ON YOUR OWN IN-HOUSE EXPERTISE?

A Our in-house expertise is our main asset, and we invest a lot of money in improving it continuously. We have in our team many engineers in software, IP networks, and storage who are trained all year long by our supplying partners but also by external trainers in this field of business. This team is built to help our sales team or technical team to face all the challenges coming from a project, whether at the vendor level or the SI level.

Q:WHAT ADVICE CAN YOU GIVE TO MANUFACTURERS ON HOW TO COOPERATE WITH VALUE-ADDED DISTRIBUTORS IN THE BEST WAY?

A Manufacturers have a lot to win if they consider our engineers as part of their team. They should create a real "geek" relationship with the technical people of the distribution company, because those people will be the best ambassadors for the brand. Manufacturers have also a lot to lose when they try to transform an added-value distributor into a box mover. This will open big doors for competition. In my point of view, a distributor like Melint has to be considered like the ambassador of the manufacturers part of our catalog, and not only as distributor. The ambassador is the one managing and defending the interest of the manufacturer in the local market where he is physically involved.