

## VENDOR

### To Be or Not to Be a Vendor



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In 1996, I started Datavision Technologies with my partner Sudharshan Chary. Our vision was to create a business intelligence system for the hotel industry – a system that could bring together data from other systems (PMS, POS, payroll, spa/golf, etc.) – and present this in such a way that users could easily customize the system to fit their business needs.

Prior to this (what seems like a lifetime ago) I worked for two hotel companies, Hilton International and InterContinental Hotels. I started off working as a front desk clerk, banquet bartender, night FD supervisor and moved onto corporate IT installing systems, running front office audits and developing training classes for hotels around the world.

At both companies, I used outside vendors for our primary systems and enhanced it with custom development. Working with different vendors enabled me to create mental checklists of items, some good and some bad. Something that would serve me well down the road as a vendor.

I learnt that flexibility is a good thing when it comes to systems – it's never a good idea to force customers to change their operations to fit the vendors' needs. The worst thing I saw was a vendor's inability to listen to how our hotel company wanted to run our business, and telling us that we didn't need a certain piece of functionality. Needless to say, they quickly lost our business. I also saw the success of 'customer-centric' vendors. Always thinking like a customer, understanding their operational needs and how they vary from customer to customer.

When I started Datavision with my partner, we had a strong vision – deliver a great product and back it up with the absolute best service possible. The customers' needs always, always, always comes first.

We believe in the power of customers. A lot of our primary contacts at a customer site is the person using the system everyday – not an intermediary department translating the users requests for the vendor or vice versa. The best testament that philosophy works is the fact that we count a lot of our customers as personal friends. We not only care about helping their company make money (or save money) by using our system, but we care about the people themselves. For us, going to HITEC and other trade shows is often like getting together with personal friends. And that's a wonderful feeling.

Which is better? I definitely enjoy being a vendor – anticipating the customers' needs and delivering them to the

best of our abilities. My years' of experiences as a customer has allowed me to develop a set of customer-first standards that I enforce within our company for our employees to follow.

The bottom line is that honest and sincere relationships are important at any level.

Here then (with nod to David Letterman) are 10 more reasons why I prefer being a vendor:

10. Bigger expense accounts. That \$2,500 dinner with 8 bottles of wine may, after all, lead to a \$100,000 sale. Sure.
9. Staying with a different hotel brand on every business trip. There's nothing like arriving late at night into the same city for the fifth time—and still have no clue where the hotel is, what the bed will feel like or what brand shampoo is in the shower.
8. What a great way to lose old friends—Tell'em that you're a vendor now and try to sell them your widgets.
7. You only have to deal with one type of database technology instead of five. (Of course, every vendor's database is the best.)
6. Rather than complaining about vendors with buggy software, we can now deal with users who complain about the buggy software. "There was some error message on the screen. But I pressed OK and it went away. No I don't know what the message said."
5. Instead of dealing with just one intimidating CIO, we get to deal with dozens!
4. At HITEC, customers get to see different vendors' front ends. We get to see different vendors' back ends – setting up their booths, crouched on the empty exhibit all floor, wearing shorts that don't quite cover everything.
3. We finally get to reveal the truth about whether vendors really show vaporware at the trade shows. And the answer is... Only those that sell steam machines.
2. Being part of *Hospitality Upgrade's* Annual Vendor Summit. Oops, wrong list. That one belongs on the "Top 10 places to see Rich Siegel schmooze" list.
1. And the No.1 reason why it's better to be a vendor than a customer. Customers write checks. Vendors cash'em. 'Nuff said.