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## **Selling against ProCurve: The Agilent Technologies Win**

### **Customer Background:**

Agilent Technologies is a Fortune 500 Company that offers tools and equipment to test more than half of the world's 1.3 billion cell phones, scientific instruments, and other sensitive, unreachable metrics scenarios. With revenue of \$7 billion, this manufacturing company equips more than 200 communications service providers and has about 20,000 employees in the US.

As an off-shoot of HP, Agilent outsources all its IT functionality to HP's professional services and global services divisions. The company retains a very small IT staff that takes decisions on IT strategies, architecture, and future planning; and vendors are aware that they need to work with HP for Agilent's day-to-day requirements.

### **Cisco involvement:**

Jyoti Pittman, Cisco Account Manager for Agilent, and her team entered a competitive environment at Agilent when Cisco walked into a struggling pilot two and half years ago. She says, "One of their biggest worries was that they had to factor in HP's high operative costs to manage their current environment, and also the IT and infrastructure team at Agilent had to deal with the numerous vendors that HP brought in.

### **Challenges at every step:**

Agilent was actually ProCurve's largest customer. And as Ms. Pittman and her team soon realized, Agilent was quite satisfied with ProCurve and saw no reason to shift to another product or technology. "They hadn't run into any issues with ProCurve infrastructure in the last 10 years and were very comfortable with ProCurve. Another challenge was ProCurve was 2-3 times cheaper than Cisco" says Ms. Pittman. "Not only were we competing with HP, we were also partnering with them. They were also our partner initially and then we had to figure out a way to compete with them head-to-head."

In addition to this unique partner-competitor environment, Cisco also had to contend with another problem in the form of Nortel. Ms. Pittman recalls, "We had them beat in terms of product technology and capabilities, but Nortel was creating problems through aggressive pricing." This stemmed from the fact that Nortel was presenting a solution that was cheaper by \$5-7 million while ProCurve's solution could prove to be a technically strong differentiator. Both the contenders offered solutions that were cheaper than Cisco's. Furthermore, Nortel decided to partner with HP, and the two were attempting to present themselves as one entity.

### **Thinking out of the box:**

The Cisco team had their work cut out for them. Agilent required more than just sound Cisco solutions; they had to be presented with a fresh approach to their IT infrastructure that neither of their competitors had shown so far.

Ms. Pittman's observation from the business perspective: "We offered an end-to-end superior intelligent platform to help reduce their current operational costs. Our solution would bring them enhanced business flexibility, agility and enable growth." Agilent realized that Cisco's solution could also empower their

business. The integrated communications platform would allow for a robust business process and healthy productivity benefits.

From the technical perspective, Deepesh Chouhan, the Systems Engineer says, “ProCurve is normally 2-3 times cheaper than Cisco. This was challenging for me, as I could not ask Cisco to reduce the price!” So Mr.Chouhan and his team went back to the drawing board and decided to present a solution that was completely different from HP-Nortel’s.

Mr.Chouhan recalls, “We used an age old strategy – and it had no secret sauce. What we proposed to Agilent was to try and do more with less.” Nortel-HP had proposed 1500 switches, and Cisco went ahead with a bold commitment of delivering the same solution with just 700 switches. “We did not bring the price down, but we reduced the number of switches which we were going to recommend. And that gave us a leg-up in terms of pricing,” he says happily.

The Cisco team agrees that it was important to first understand where Agilent was heading in their business plans. Mr.Chouhan says, “The architecture was pretty flexible. It could scale up or down, could be re-organized based upon where Agilent was going as a company. For example, they had a massive real estate adjustment, how could Agilent’s architecture adjust or accommodate these changes?” This was an issue that could be solved using Cisco’s out-of-the-box thinking.

#### **CISCO Solutions:**

The whole process of proposing an architecture that meets with the customer’s requirements and not doing box-to-box comparisons was what clinched the deal.

In Agilent’s case, Mr.Chouhan says, “Our solution comprised predominantly of Catalyst 3000 (3K) switches for access. We also had Catalyst 6500 in some core locations, routers like ISRs, also recommended a global IP telephony refresh. Their current infrastructure was aging. We also recommended a wireless refresh for the existing infrastructure. It was a comprehensive end-to-end Cisco solution.”

#### **The real differentiators:**

Ms.Pittman gives her insight on the Agilent case saying, “It is important to identify your executive sponsor very early on. HP is a very tough competitor and you’re not going to win against them easily. You need your executive sponsor to guide you and be your champion for the bigger business issues facing the customer.” She feels that it is important to build a strong business case and make sure that the account team is ready to take on the ownership for building the vision.

“While the customer could feel that you may be a little more expensive today, they should understand that down the road Cisco solutions are all about savings.”

Mr.Chouhan sums up the situation, saying: “It is important for sales to understand the business drivers— what the customer is trying to achieve, not just what they’re trying to buy. We need to do competitive homework about HP ProCurve before we get into a battle with them,” he finishes.

**Additional Learnings:**

- Do not pitch for a box-to-box pricing war, it will only lead to longer cycles
- Understand what business problem the customer is trying to solve will help provide creative solutions
- Identify and build a strong relationship with the business executive sponsor, and spend time in learning the business prerogatives. They will help your solution presentation better
- Involve the technical team in the process right in the beginning, so the sales team can actually present a business solution rather than just a product or box.