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NEWS ANALYSIS AND PERSPECTIVE FOR VARs AND TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATORS

ANNUAL REPORT CARD

MIDRANGE SERVERS

Cisco

By Chad Berndtson

One of the most eye-popping victories in all of this year's Annual Report Card categories is the full subcategory all-sweep win in a product category by a vendor that didn't even play in that category as recently as three years ago.

The vendor: Cisco. In an impressive show of strength for its Unified Computing System (UCS), Cisco served notice to the HPs, IBMs and Dells of the world that the anti-Cisco posturing they've done around server market share just doesn't seem to be working. The vendor's victory in Midrange Servers was not only complete, but it was also by a wide margin. Cisco's three subcategory averages beat No. 2 HP and No. 3 IBM by no slimmer than a seven-point differential.

Avnet, which signed on as a Cisco distributor three years ago, has a special place in the Cisco distribution ecosystem because it's a specialty partner focused solely on Cisco data center products. The ecosystem play around UCS, in which solution providers can combine solutions from EMC and VMware, or NetApp, or other data center players, into a converged stack is hugely compelling, said Darren Adams, general manager and vice president of Avnet's Cisco Solutions Group.

MIDRANGE (HIGH-END) SERVERS ($25,000 AND ABOVE)	PRODUCT INNOVATION AVERAGES	SUPPORT AVERAGES	PARTNERSHIP AVERAGES	OVERALL SCORE
Cisco	95.3	82.3	85.0	**87.7**
HP	86.4	70.4	74.6	**77.4**
IBM	84.3	70.3	70.3	**75.0**

"[Cisco] looked at virtualization and what the effect was going to be there and designed UCS to go after that," Adams said. "It's done a great job as a piece of the converged infrastructure and building of that cloud-based network solution."

What's clear is that despite its many productive business partnerships, Cisco will keep its eye on the data center ball and look to grow UCS. If that means both partnering and competing with companies such as EMC and VMware, according to Cisco, that's the reality of strategic vendor alliances these days.

"It's a complex ecosystem out there," said Rob Lloyd, Cisco executive vice president, worldwide operations, describing how Cisco both partners with and competes with vendors like VMware, Microsoft and IBM.

"So let's not get confused. We're encouraging our teams to compartmentalize."

For detailed ranking table click here: CRN's Annual Report Card 2012