Kicking Off Customer Success for Partners at Aruba - 500% Growth in Partner Participation in 12 Months

Customer Success as a Service®

CASE STUDY

Aruba, a Hewlett Packard Enterprise company, got its start as a hardware manufacturer. Today, they are an industry leader in unified mobility technology. As demand for more agile and scalable modern networks has soared, Aruba introduced as-a-service (aaS) offerings to provide customers with more flexible, next-generation workplace solutions. Aruba network-as-a-service (NaaS) solutions help businesses around the globe keep pace with ever-evolving network requirements in an increasingly digital landscape, while reducing the cost of operations and enhancing security.

As Aruba expanded into the aaS world, they recognized the need for an entirely new customer engagement model and created a Customer Success organization from the ground up. For help in this monumental endeavor, they partnered with ESG to rapidly get up to speed on Customer Success best practices and build out a complete strategy that could easily evolve with them as they move forward in their CS journey.

In 2021, we continued our collaboration with Aruba to amplify their CS capabilities once again. Carlos Quezada, Head of Customer Success at Aruba, established Aruba's Customer Success organization from within professional services. For the next phase of development, he introduced the ESG team to Karl Hofmeister, Senior Program Manager on the Aruba Channels team. Working closely with ESG, Hofmeister was able to set up a Customer Success for partners program to nurture customers through the distribution channel. Within a year, Aruba launched the HPE Partner Ready Vantage Customer Success Center of Expertise as one of three new centers.

HIGHLIGHTS

Business Challenge:

Develop a Customer Success Center of Expertise to engage and educate Aruba channel partners with Customer Success (CS) principles and best practices.

Objective:

Equipping Aruba partners with a common vernacular and framework for CS fundamentals that they can leverage to improve customer relationships.

Results:

The team developed new Customer Success for partners deliverables for the Aruba program,which resulted in a 500% increase in partner participation within the first 12 months.

"Having ESG as a partner has been absolutely instrumental to the success of the program. There's tremendous value in working with a vendor who has helped other organizations take the same journey."

– Karl Hofmeister
Senior Program Manager, Aruba

The Aruba Customer Success Center of Expertise now provides Aruba partners with the coaching, playbooks, and digital platform necessary to support their customers through the entire lifecycle, improving customer adoption, retention, and renewals.

> **"ESG provided Aruba with a streamlined approach to Customer Success that allows our partners to do this work more effectively, more efficiently. That framework is something that's repeatable and scalable. The playbooks give partners a codified approach and the tools they need to understand where the customer is in their journey, their level of customer health, and how best to continue fostering that relationship for the long term."**
>
> - Karl Hofmeister, Senior Program Manager, Aruba

Scaling Customer Success Through the Partner Channel

After establishing a Customer Success organization, what's your next step? With 96% of their customers buying through the channel, for Aruba, the answer to that question was clear. They needed to take everything they learned about CS and apply it through the channel to help their partners' customers succeed as much as their direct customers.

"Carlos had kicked off Aruba's Customer Success journey and brought on ESG to help guide us through that process," recalls Hofmeister. "As part of that jumping-off point, ESG had performed a Customer Success Maturity Assessment for Aruba. It had highlighted that one of the areas of future focus should be enabling our channel partners to drive Customer Success.

"At the same time, on the channel side, we were interested in figuring out how to better equip our partners to drive as a service. So, there became this synergy between the two: Carlos interested in driving, growing, and maturing Aruba's CS organization, and the Aruba Channels team interested in driving success for our partners. It became a joint effort with the teams working together — channel and services."

Network as a service was taking off, and Aruba was ready to advance their CS program to the next stage. Because ESG was already (more than a little!) familiar with Aruba's CS approach, a Customer Success for partners initiative could hit the ground running. Together, the team had already constructed a complete customer journey map of their direct customers' lifecycle. The team reworked that customer journey map into a partner journey map. This tool provided the launching point for the Customer Success for partners pilot program. "That journey map gave us the credibility we needed during internal and external discussions and a foundation we could extend out to our partners," says Hofmeister.

A Customer Success Maturity Assessment Tailored to the Partner Experience

But getting partners to join a Customer Success program is not as simple as just asking. Partners want to know what's in it for them. They may not yet see the value of CS principles and practices. They might have their own ideas of what CS is, or they might not have a basis for the concept at all.

And everyone is going to have their own systems in place — from simple spreadsheets to sophisticated digital tools — for tracking their customer relationships.

As one of the benefits of joining the Customer Success Center of Expertise, Hofmeister wanted to offer his partners a way to gain a deeper level of understanding of their own internal CS maturity. "ESG's Customer Success Maturity Model examines 17 different dimensions of CS. It takes multiple days, and it's a one-on-one, comprehensive assessment of an organization's strengths and weaknesses. I wanted to see if we could do an abridged version of this to help our partners assess where they are on the CS Maturity scale," explains Hofmeister. "ESG put together an automated Customer Success Maturity Model that we could use in Qualtrics. So, as a partner is onboarding, they have access to that online CS Maturity matrix that helps them identify where they are, going deeper based on their level of expertise. It helps us get better insight into where the partners are in their CS journey, and it helps partners understand where they need to be to grow and build their own CS capabilities."

Not only does this assessment provide an incentive for a partner to join the program and kick off the onboarding process, but it also demonstrates Aruba's credibility as Customer Success experts who can help their partners navigate this critical process. "We had a new partner coming on board, a very large one," recalls Hofmeister, "and when we mentioned the maturity assessment, they were really interested and took it right away. Because we could deliver that valuable feedback, it facilitated the onboarding process for that important partner."

> **"ESG was very receptive to our needs. That they were willing to take something that was more of a deep dive and workshop and port that into a tool that we could take to our partners was a significant value add for us."**
>
> - Karl Hofmeister, Senior Program Manager, Aruba

A Human-First, Digital Approach

Another crucial factor in the success of the pilot program was the mingling of tech touch and human touch. A member of the ESG team, acting as the first Partner Success Manager (PSM), developed and delivered live coaching to guide the partners through the onboarding process. The larger ESG team then took what they learned and produced an online training program. Now, after partners go through this training, a Partner Success Manager follows up with them for further coaching, meeting with them regularly to ensure the partner's progress.

"They're guided through things like how to execute a Customer Success plan, working inside our CS platform, and how to hire and onboard a CSM," says Hofmeister. "Rather than fully automating the process, ESG ensured we find the right balance between tech touch and real, human interactions. Partner Success Managers reassure our partners that this program is for them. We're saying that we want to help them grow their practice over time to drive more opportunities for expansion through their customer base."

"What ESG was able to do was provide the structure and a lot of the science behind Customer Success that we could then take and make available to partners."

- Karl Hofmeister, Senior Program Manager, Aruba

Customer Success as a Value Realization Engine for Partners

After a year, Aruba officially launched the program, and partners can participate by applying online. Those that meet the criteria are automatically enrolled and have a variety of tools and support from Aruba to help them deliver CS best practices to their customers.

Customer Success Center of Expertise partner deliverables include:

CS Maturity Assessment
The digitized Customer Success Maturity Assessment provides Aruba's partners with deeper understanding and insights regarding their internal CS capabilities, strengths, and opportunities for improvement.

CS Dashboard
Partners gain access to Aruba's Customer Success platform with a dashboard that shows key metrics, product telemetry, and customer lifecycle data.

Support from an Aruba PSM
The Aruba PSM is a member of the Customer Success team who personalizes the onboarding experience for each new partner. They work collaboratively with their assigned partners to assist with CS training and best practices, review and execution of playbooks for each customer lifecycle stage (onboarding, adoption, and renewal), and the creation and maintenance of CS plans.

Customer Journey Map coaching
PSMs will help partners guide their customers through the CS phases based on the Land, Adopt, Expand, and Renew (LAER) Model. A mix of digital and human touchpoints is recommended based on customer tier level.

CS Playbooks
Partners can access a database of all existing and updated CS material, including digital content templates, CS best practices, guides for creating CS plans, renewal playbooks, and survey feedback processes.

Partner participation in the program grew 500% in the first year, and new partners are signing up every month. Aruba is ready for them.