

IT WEEK

Oracle offers to hold hand of tech start ups

New service offers advice and support for UK technology start ups

James Murray, IT Week, 21 Jun 2007



Oracle has launched a new service for UK technology startups that will see it offer a range of products and services designed to help them get their products to a wider market.

The company said that the new Emerging Partner Programme would see a dedicated team provide technology, consulting, technical advice and networking opportunities to startups. The team will also help plug skills gaps within startups, particularly offering advice on how to exploit new Web 2.0 technologies to commercialise their products.

Speaking at a roundtable event yesterday to mark the launch of the new service, Chris Baker, senior vice president for technology at Oracle in the UK, Ireland and Israel, said that the aim of the new service, which has been successfully piloted for the past year, was to ensure that more tech startups turn their ideas into commercially successful products.

"Innovation is not just about invention, it is also about application and turning the invention into something useful, which is not something we've traditionally been great at in the UK," he said. "We want to help companies so they don't just invent, but also have a platform from which to grow their business."

Charles Armstrong, CEO of analytics software startup Trampoline Systems which has piloted the new service, said that Oracle's support had helped the young company access technical advice and plug gaps in its skills base.

"Having a mentoring team from a company that develops advanced technology and sells it has been really useful," he said. "For example, as we build a sales team we can call Oracle and get advice on the best way to approach it."

Sales is typically the Achilles heel of UK technology startups, according to Mike Southon, author of *The Beermat Entrepreneur*, who argued that Oracle's support could prove extremely beneficial.

James Davies, managing director of business intelligence (BI) software start up Indico BI, said that Oracle's support had also helped the company access new customers, providing an endorsement of its software and introductions to potential customers.

Mike Southon, author of *The Beermat Entrepreneur*, argued that the endorsement of a multinational company can enhance the credibility of a startup in the eyes of risk-averse customers. "Oracle is known for being hard-nosed and commercial, so if it says a startup has a good idea it has credibility," he said.

Alongside entrepreneurial support, the new service will also offer firms technical guidance, providing startups with access to Oracle assessments on future technology trends and advice on how to scale their IT infrastructure.

"Startups that develop a good idea often just grab the most available IT and if that is freeware that is what they use," explained Alan Hartwell at Oracle. "But that often means they can't scale easily -- you can inhibit growth by going with the wrong technology early on."

Baker added that the new service would focus on ensuring technology startups have an understanding of the opportunities Web 2.0-style technologies give them. "There is a danger that businesses are run by middle-aged people who simply don't understand Web 2.0 technology," he said. "As a technology company we need to make it clear what is available."

Oracle insisted, however, that despite the similarities the new programme it would not be treading on the toes of venture capitalists. "We invest time and skills, but we don't invest any money through this programme," said Baker.