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Q&A: DISTREE EMEA 2012

Celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2012, DISTREE Events CEO Farouk Hemraj discusses the event's development and why it remains a highly productive event for all attendees



PARIS, LONDON, DUBAI, MOSCOW and SAO PAULO – DISTREE EMEA 2012 takes place from February 7-10th 2012 in Monaco. DISTREE EMEA is the largest annual gathering of senior executives from vendors, volume distributors, retailers and e-tailers working in Europe, Middle East & Africa's (EMEA's) Information Communications Technologies (ICT) and Consumer Electronics (CE) channel.

Farouk Hemraj, CEO at DISTREE Events, recently took part in an interview to discuss the planning for DISTREE EMEA 2012, what delegates can expect from next year's event and details on how the format and structure of EMEA's premier volume channel event continues to evolve.

Q: How is the planning for DISTREE EMEA 2012 taking shape? Given the volatile situation in the Eurozone, are you expecting this to have an impact on next year's event?

Farouk Hemraj (FH): There is no denying that market conditions in Europe's major markets are challenging at present given the current economic volatility. It is important to remember that DISTREE EMEA gives vendors access to premium channel partners – be they distributors, retailers and e-tailers - from 80-plus countries in the Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA) region. Demand may be flat in major European markets such as the UK, France and even Germany, but that should not detract from the growth potential that exists in the wider EMEA region. Vendors need to maintain their operations in major markets and drive maximum efficiency from their channels. Simultaneously, they need to take full advantage of the double-digit growth rates that still exist in Russia & CIS, the Middle East and emerging markets Eastern Europe and Africa.

Q: Fair point, but how can a vendor justify the expense involved in attending an event such as DISTREE EMEA? Is it a wise use of channel and business development funds?

FH: It is important to understand exactly how DISTREE EMEA works to answer that question. We pride ourselves on delivering an event that offers the most cost-effective way for all vendors involved in the EMEA region's volume ICT and consumer electronics (CE) market to manage, build or launch routes-to-market. We gather together representatives from the region's leading volume distributors, retailers and e-tailers together in one place at one time for a single event. For a vendor, the cost of attending DISTREE EMEA represents a fraction of what they would pay to either organise their own event or travel the length and breadth of EMEA meeting these partners in their own countries. It is cost-effective and also time-efficient for vendors to attend DISTREE EMEA.

Q: That makes sense, but with so many other vendors there, how can they make sure they meet the right people at DISTREE EMEA?

FH: DISTREE EMEA is an inclusive event and prides itself on its independence. Yes, we have hundreds of vendors attending each year, but we cannot stress enough that this is not a traditional trade show. All meetings that take place are pre-scheduled one-on-one meetings and prior to the event delegates have the opportunity to research the companies attending, request the meetings that best fit their business needs and build their own personal agenda. You're right, this is about efficiency. It is a format that allows vendors to get more done in less time for less expense. We run a Pan-European Distributor Programme (PDP) for companies such as Ingram Micro giving an opportunity to gather for their senior management team to request meetings with vendors. The event also attracts representatives from A-brand vendors who understand that even if they have an established distribution and retail channel in EMEA, it is important for them to stay informed and up to speed with the competitive landscape and the changing structure of go-to-market models.

Q: You mentioned changing structures there and I see that e-tailers and retailers are also invited to attend DISTREE EMEA now. Why are they involved in what started out as an event for vendors to meet distributors?

FH: DISTREE EMEA celebrates its 10th anniversary in 2012. The event has grown and been successful over the last decade by evolving to reflect changes in the market and new business models in the channel. Top retailers and e-tailers continue to play a huge role in shaping and fulfilling consumer demand in EMEA. Increasingly, retailers and e-tailers engage with both vendors and distributors to build routes-to-market. Vendors need to interact with retailers from a marketing perspective and still work with distributors on fulfilment. For DISTREE EMEA being an inclusive event means bringing all of the major stakeholders together in one place at one time. This is the one event where senior representatives from a vendor, distributor and e-tailer can sit down together and formulate the plans and action points to drive their collaborative channel business efforts for the next 12 months.

Q: What sort of attendance are you expecting in 2012? How strong has the sign-up been for next year's event?

FH: We're expecting another sold out event and an audience of approximately 1000 delegates. DISTREE EMEA has been around for a decade and during that time we have built strong relationships with top distributors in the region. Senior executives from these distributors realise the value and benefits they receive from attending DISTREE EMEA. Put yourself in their shoes. You are invited to spend three days at one event where you can meet executives from your existing vendor partners, evaluate potential new suppliers, hear from a wide selection of industry experts, network with your peers and catch up on all the latest industry news. All that in three days – it's a no-brainer. Now compare that to spending a week on a stand at a traditional trade show, or attending an event where you only meet one vendor. Maximum business benefits in minimum time; that's what attending DISTREE EMEA is all about.

Q: What else is available for DISTREE EMEA delegates apart from scheduling and attending one-on-one meetings during the event?

FH: It is an action-packed three days for delegates. As an independent event, we strive to bring in a broad selection of speakers from multiple research houses and analyst firms. Again, this is a significant benefit for delegates in comparison to other events where they may just hear one perspective and have nothing else to benchmark it against. This year's conference programme includes sessions from bChannels, Booz & Co., Context, Forrester, GfK, Global Technology Distribution Council (GTDC), IDC, purechannelapps, Regent and VIA. We're delighted to have Dr. Michael Peterson from Booz & Co. with us in 2012 discussing what the next wave of digitisation means for business.

As well as keynote presentations, we have introduced the '2012 Directions' sessions, which enable delegates to register for a more focused presentation and discussion group with the speakers that they are most interested in. On the Thursday afternoon the successful Strategy Forum also takes place at DISTREE EMEA. This 'invitation only' session gathers together leading vendor and distributor representatives for discussion of topical issues influencing the EMEA channel.

One of the new innovations put in place for DISTREE EMEA 2012 is greater access to our expert speakers for event delegates. What this means is that delegates will have the opportunity to request and schedule their own one-on-one meetings with expert speakers during the event. Don't just hear from channel experts at DISTREE EMEA, schedule your own one-on-one meetings with them. If you're looking to buy or sell a channel business talk to Regent, if you want advice on how embrace social media request a meeting with purechannelapps, or for help refining a multichannel go-to-market model set up a discussion with VIA. If you want greater understanding of the market trends in a specific product segment or country, companies such as Context, GfK and IDC will all be available during the event.

Q: What would be your message to vendors and channel partners still wavering about whether to attend DISTREE EMEA?

FH: That's a great question. The hardest part is persuading a vendor, retailer or distributor to attend for the very first time. Once they've been and seen just how valuable and efficient the event really is, the vast majority return year after year. That is what has driven the growth of DISTREE EMEA. Rather than give you my message I would rather point out what Microsoft, the Platinum Sponsor of DISTREE 2012, said. Announcing the sponsorship, Dana Manciangli, General Manager Worldwide OEM Distribution & Reseller Channel at Microsoft, stated: "Microsoft is honoured to be a major sponsor for DISTREE EMEA once again. This event is an extremely powerful way to build relationships with many of our channel partners and the event just gets better every year."

I think it is important for vendors to demonstrate their ongoing commitment to the channel and DISTREE EMEA is the perfect platform to achieve this. It is a focused event and also one where there is opportunity for discussions between vendors on potential collaboration. For e-tailers, retailers and distributors the event is an amazing opportunity to find new suppliers, learn more about product roadmaps, identify new supply sources and network with the channel elite from across EMEA.

Q: Will DISTREE EMEA include awards programmes again in 2012?

FH: The 'EMEA Channel Academy: 2012 Awards' will take place on Thursday February 9th 2012 in conjunction with DISTREE EMEA. The fourth annual awards ceremony will provide an independent and vendor-neutral platform for senior channel executives to select and recognise the outstanding vendors and distributors operating in EMEA.

Next year's awards will cover 25 categories, identifying the outstanding 'Vendor of the Year' in 12 separate product categories, crowning the 'Distributor of the Year' in 10 sub-regions within EMEA, and handing out one accolade for the 'EMEA Distributor Initiative of the Year'. In addition, the awards will include two 'Hall of Fame' awards, recognising individuals for outstanding achievement within the EMEA channel.

Now entering their fourth year, the methodology behind the awards is highly effective. Hundreds of distributors across EMEA nominate their preferred vendors by category, while vendor executives with EMEA responsibility, nominate their preferred distributors by sub-region. The top five in each category receive an official nomination. During the Gala Dinner, the excitement really builds as distributors select the winning vendors through a live electronic vote, and the vendor executives present perform the same task to determine the winning distributors.

The ever popular '60 Seconds to Convince' awards programme will also take place at DISTREE EMEA, giving vendors the opportunity to deliver an elevator pitch for their latest products. In addition, we're delighted to welcome back Fred Brown from the Sightline Group for the 'Fresh: A First Look at New Technology' product showcase that will explain some of the technology innovations and evolutions shaping consumer demand in 2012 and beyond.

Q: Do you look forward to DISTREE EMEA each year?

FH: It is a lot of work but it is also a lot of fun. Yes, I do look forward to it. We have created a community of senior channel executives in EMEA and this is their annual gathering. The greatest strength of the channel is that its success is based on collaboration between businesses and that is what the event promotes. It is an ideal platform for vendors regardless of whether they are newcomers to EMEA or have established channels in place. DISTREE EMEA is the event to attend and it is where the major issues facing the channel are discussed between key stakeholders. Close to 1000 delegates will attend DISTREE EMEA 2012, representing more than US\$50 billion of channel sales in the EMEA region. There is no better place for vendors to meet senior executives from the region's leading distributors, retailers and e-tailers. I would recommend all e-tailers, retailers, distributors and vendors interested in attending visit www.distree-emea.com to find out more. Get involved – you won't regret it.

About DISTREE Events

DISTREE Events specialises in the planning, organisation, staging and management of channel-focused ICT & CE events. The team at DISTREE Events has successfully organised events for more than a decade gathering more than 10,000 senior executives from 80 countries during that time. DISTREE Events spans the entire EMEA theatre and Latin America with employees based in Dubai, London, Moscow, Sao Paulo and Paris.

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