Discussing marketing activities with the very people these activities are trying to influence can be a little awkward—rather like giving away the secrets of a magic trick while performing the magic. In many ways, however, you, as a CNE and networking professional, are more of a partner to Novell than a customer. After all, you have made a significant investment in Novell technology, and because you recommend Novell technology, your success and the success of your company may depend on how well Novell can continue to solve your business problems.

Given your vested interest in Novell, you are probably familiar with Novell’s new strategy—what Novell calls the “Novell story.” As you read about Novell’s one Net vision and Net services software mission, you may be tempted, as I was, to view the Novell story solely as an effective marketing message. However, as Darin Richins, vice president of Novell Global Marketing, explains in the following interview, the Novell story is more than a marketing message. It is a “fundamental shift for the company” that is giving Novell the power to change both its future and yours.

Q: Why is Novell viable long-term?
A: First, we have an incredibly loyal customer and partner base. People have always believed that Novell has strong technology, strong products, and good core values as far as a company is concerned. Now people are going to see the marketing expertise and execution improve and be on par with those other pieces. And once you have that marriage of good technology and products with effective marketing and brand awareness activities, that creates a viable Novell long-term.

Q: Novell has experienced a slump in sales. What specifically is Novell Marketing doing to reverse that slump?
A: The slump in sales came about for specific reasons—which were broadly communicated—but it was also at the same time we were rolling out a new Novell story—with new positioning and new messaging—that people have been really excited about. The new positioning and messaging have been very well received by our customers, our partners, the press, and analysts. Everybody has felt that the messaging is “spot on” and a place where Novell can play and be successful.

Now people are waiting for the execution side. They’ve heard our vision of one Net; they’ve heard our mission—that we intend to be the leading provider of Net services software. Now people need to see both product development and marketing execution map to what they’ve heard. I believe the turnaround as far as slumping sales is just that: product development that ties to the Novell story—to what we are trying to accomplish to bring one Net to the industry and the marketplace—and flawless marketing execution so that there is a heavier emphasis in our message and we’re communicating more broadly and in higher-profile mediums.

Q: How would you measure Novell’s progress in delivering Net services software?
A: I think it’s on track. I don’t know that we’re necessarily ahead of or behind schedule. People have to understand that this was a fundamental shift for the company. We’ve been a solid product company, but now we’re talking about becoming a solid solutions company—both with our own products and our partners’ products. We’re also talking about being more effective communicators and marketers about those products and solutions. And, oh by the way, we are giving everybody an
A: One of the most significant things Novell stands for and where we want to be three to five years down the road.

We started communicating the new message in the spring, and organizational changes have occurred inside the company to reflect this new mission and vision for the company. Some of our significant marketing activities started hitting in June. In the summer months, we did very calculated marketing activities worldwide. But we’re focusing our efforts in the fall time frame, when the industry reawakens, when everyone’s back from vacation. Fall and winter, people should see some amazingly fun and exciting things from Novell.

Q: Some people have felt that Novell is walking away from NetWare. What part does NetWare play in Novell’s Net services software?

A: NetWare is a very critical part of the Net services software strategy. It is unfortunate that people have perceived that we are walking away from NetWare because that’s just not true. If you understand the whole Net services software strategy, the great thing about it is that NetWare has a strategic home, and it’s very much a service on the network, which has always been the product’s strength. However, people use NetWare—whether they use it for file and print, for desktop management, or for an enterprise platform—the NetWare is operating system is still an incredibly important piece. We’re just talking about expanding our offerings. NetWare is just one Net services software product that drives us to creating one Net so that companies can more effectively communicate to their customers, their partners, their employees, etc.

Q: To deliver a complete suite of Net services software, Novell needs effective partnerships. What is Novell doing to ensure that its partnerships provide real benefits to users?

A: One of the most significant things people will see in our partnering organization is that we are driving a lot more focus into the organization. In the past, one of Novell’s challenges was trying to be all things to all people, and while that’s a very inclusive strategy, it’s short on focus. Right now, we have employees who are dedicated to bringing more focus to our partnering. These employees are making sure that we deliver on our promises to our strategic partners and that we understand and we promote more heavily the levels of engagement and the pieces that will make each relationship successful. Then the partnership will be a win-win for the strategic partner, Novell, and, of course, our mutual customers.

Q: How is Novell marketing Net services software to CxOs?

A: The C-level audience is extremely important to us. For example, at a recent trade show, a senior IS person said to me, “We love Novell products; we like doing business with Novell, but when are you going to talk to my boss?”

We’ve heard lots of comments like this one, and I believe that the industry will finally see Novell paying attention to that feedback.

In fact, that’s why we love the one Net vision and Net services software mission because the C-level audience understands them. They can understand that we’re trying to take chaos and move it to order, that we’re trying to take complex to simple, and that’s why we’re talking about multiple networks becoming one Net.

The C-level audience also understands the benefits of our one Net vision. They understand that we’re talking about saving time and money and helping their departments leverage resources. Likewise, they can understand Net services software at the highest level—they can understand what we’re trying to accomplish, how we’re going to deliver our software and our technology to the industry. And it’s an easy message for the senior IT and even the CIO to communicate internally.

That’s why we think we’ll have success. Now that we have the message, we’re communicating more aggressively—and that’s through print advertising that’s running now and it’s through television advertising that people are going to see this fall. We’ve also changed our public relations strategy so that our editorial opportunities are more with the business publications.

We’ve made all these changes with the intent of reinforcement so that when the IS manager or the senior IT director pitches Novell, upper management will support it, and they’ll know who we are, what we stand for, and the space we play in.

Q: Trade magazines and business magazines seldom feature Novell when they are discussing e-business players, even though Novell has the best foundation for e-commerce, which is NDS eDirectory. How will Novell establish itself as a relevant e-commerce player?

A: Since we already have a significant technology solution in this space—again the directory is the foundation for all e-business solutions—the gap has clearly been a marketing one. So we have to solve that, and we will. That’s going to mean more aggressive communication and marketing around the directory as a platform and as a necessary technology investment for a company’s e-business.

We have marketing campaigns in development right now that are specifically going to talk about how Novell helps solve problems for e-business executives. As you know, e-commerce or e-business has even become a position or role player inside the company management. So we have an obligation to start talking more aggressively and having our marketing messages and activities reach out to e-business executives.
inside companies and organizations around the world.

A side from that marketing challenge, however, our product story has to tie into and integrate with e-commerce or e-solutions business environments. We have an obligation to our customers not only have the message but to deliver products that help them structure, organize, maintain, and build upon their e-business solution. A few all what’s driving people to one Net is an e-business or e-commerce reason. So our real obligation is proper product development to make sure that people understand that we are the leading provider of Net services software and we’re solving a business problem for them.

Q: What is Novell doing to attract new customers?
A: Interestingly enough, this again ties into some of the things we are doing in marketing. We have a specific marketing program built around new customers. We definitely understand the need to reach out to non-Novell customers. We’re not necessarily talking about customers that have shifted over to a competitor; we’re talking about customers and organizations that have not had any Novell products and perhaps don’t even know what we do or what we stand for.

We need to change that. In doing so, we have created a complete marketing program that has dollars, resources, and people associated with it. This will ensure that we understand the segment, we understand the customer, we know what messages they need and want, and what product deliverables they need and want in order to even entertain or include us in their product consideration. This program is quite significant. Novell has never really had such a dedicated effort to go after the non-Novell customer.

It’s a great opportunity for us right now. With the instability of some of our competitors, we can go in and perhaps take some of the business away from them and sell the importance of our directory solutions, our caching, and our messaging— all of these different great product opportunities that we can go in and sell to people who have not experienced Novell products before.

Q: What is Novell doing to sell Net services software to service providers?
A: Just as we have a marketing program that is dedicated to non-Novell customers or new name accounts, we have a similar program of equal value that is targeted to the XSP audience—the ISPs, A SPs, N SPs, etc.

A gain this program has people, resources, and money dedicated to it so we can deliver products that will work for this audience. ISPs, A SPs, and N SPs will get communication, they’ll get marketing information, and they’ll understand how they can be both partners and customers of Novell.

In fact, this is just one of the customer segments that now have a specific marketing program directed to them. We have identified seven specific marketing programs, which we call internally the “sacred seven.” These programs are audience-oriented; they have their own messaging; they have budget; they have objectives. These programs are a huge shift for Novell, and it’s bringing so much focus to our marketing.

Q: How do customers know that this time Novell has it right—that this time Novell is going to be consistent and successful in delivering on this strategy?
A: We’re hoping that people will trust us enough based on the history to give us a chance. We know we absolutely have to deliver. Right now, your readers—our customers—and our partners are starting to see the new Novell come out. They’re starting to see a tag line of “The Power To Change.” That’s our promise to our customers and to our partners, and that promise is twofold: Not only are we going to do things that will help them change their business for the positive and give them the power to change, but we’re also taking it to heart inside of Novell. We believe our customers, partners, and suppliers will see change. If they don’t see that change inside the company, then we won’t succeed. But if they do see that power to change both inside and outside in how we are helping our customers, then people have a reason to stick with us.

The proof is in the execution. If we don’t execute, they don’t need to believe us. But we can only hope that they will give us enough time to show them that this is a new Novell, and it’s going to work.