iil collab to grow

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collabtogrow Case Study

Learn how 8base helped collabtogrow create a powerful multi-tenant SaaS product for managing strategic alliances. Bringing this idea to life was all about doing more with less.

Multi-Tenant SaaS   B2B Collaboration   Process Management   Financial Management   CRM Integration

ERP Integration   Document Management   Business Intelligence   Balanced Scorecard

8 base

In today's business environment, strategic alliances between companies are critical.

Companies can become greater than the sum of their parts by leveraging each other's strengths, technologies, and market positions. Robert Jones, co-founder of Boston-based collabtogrow, discovered that most strategic alliances were managed using archaic spreadsheets and presentations that were inaccessible to many stakeholders, and often contained out-of-date information.

> *"There is no real technology enablement in the alliance space,"* *notes Jones. "This is one of the reasons that you see such abysmal* *failure rates among strategic alliances. Companies are managing* *this incredibly mission-critical venture with technologies like it's* *1985. The ability to digitize and modernize these collaborations is* *an incredible opportunity for collabtogrow."*

Jones and collabtogrow co-founder Ken Coppins envisioned a software-as-a-service (SaaS) platform to tackle this challenge, and they turned to the 8base team to bring the idea to life. With 8base's production-ready serverless "back-end-as-a-service," Jones and his team were able to do more with less, ultimately bootstrapping collabtogrow and creating a valuable solution for alliance management.

THE CHALLENGES OF STRATEGIC ALLIANCES

Successful strategic alliances can be a boon to business, but Jones has found that they often fail for one of these main reasons:

1 The alliance was not properly articulated through a strong business case, and success was not measured by relevant, agreed-upon key performance indicators (KPIs).

2 The senior management team is not actively engaged in the alliance; while these executives may have forged a relationship with a counterpart, they often take a hands-off approach once an alliance is in place.

3 The magnitude of the alliance is not recognized by one or both parties, so appropriate infrastructure is not established. Proper project management best practices are crucial to bridging different company cultures in creating something bigger than the sum of its parts.

"We knew that we had the experience to help a market that was dramatically underserved by the available technology," Jones says. "The quarterly business review is the most antiquated business activity around. Many companies don't have the technology in place to do a proper review. Consequently, analysts are scurrying around trying to gather data—and often inventing it—to create what is ultimately a review based on fiction."

Jones notes that when two major companies come together to form an alliance, they almost always have different systems and security protocols, and it's almost impossible to find an internal piece of technology that allows the partners to collaborate.

Even something as simple as getting a federated instant messaging service would take an act of Congress.

Jones envisioned partner companies having all relevant information, data and insight in one central location where partners can perform an "anytime business review." That's what collabtogrow aims to achieve with its SaaS platform—empowering the C–level executive or any alliance team member to see the overall health of the partnership in real–time.
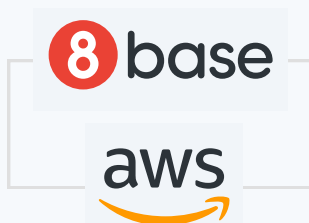
Developing collabtogrow Succeed™ on the 8base platform – built on top of Amazon Web Services (AWS) – created the perfect solution to the problem.

"A SaaS cloud–based platform is ideal for alliances," Jones says. "You have two separate companies with no real place to house their intersecting data and information. collabtogrow is kind of like Switzerland: it's not a specific partner's space; it's their place, the alliance's place to collaborate and work together."

DOING MORE, WITH LESS

Far from being a non-technical founder, who may have a fantastic idea but limited knowledge in how to implement it, Robert Jones (call him Bob) is a technology expert.


Jones began his career as a software developer and ultimately became a CIO. His technical background is what led him to think critically about how he could develop and maintain the collabtogrow platform on a bootstrapped budget.

"I've been a CIO. I didn't want to be in the IT business again managing 500 people, and clearly we didn't want to have a six-figure software developer on the payroll early on," joked Jones. "collabtogrow needed a technology partner that could provide deep technical expertise, software development and hosting infrastructure. I wanted to solve a unique business problem in helping clients build strategic alliances. I did not want to become a high-tech company."

Jones says he was always planning to outsource the development of collabtogrow Succeed™ to a third party. The team looked at traditional on-shore development shops and off-shore development companies. Finding a partner that could leverage low-code or prebuilt components was crucial for Jones, who knows that customization always results in additional work: "Less code is always better."

While many non-technical entrepreneurs are focused solely on the development of their platform, Jones knows that the sysadmin and online hosting aspects of the application are as important as the steady-state maintenance mode.

collabtogrow certainly was pushing the do-more-with-less ethos to the extreme: they were looking to build a SaaS application and develop an extendable platform that could help them rapidly go to market without on-staff technical resources, working with a single partner to develop, host, and maintain the application—and all this at a reasonable cost.
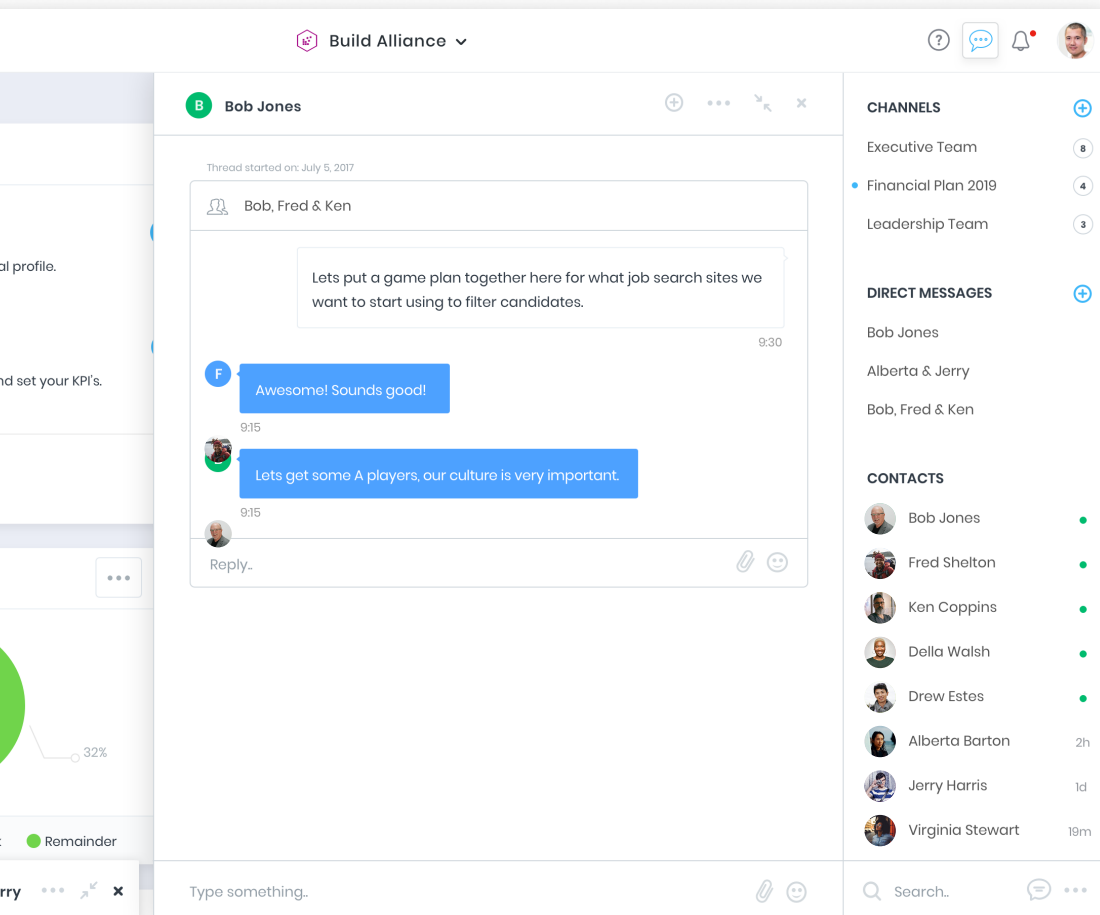
collabtogrow Succeed™ has rich collaboration capabilities built in that empower stakeholders across the alliance value chain to manage success in realtime.

FINDING A TRUSTED TECHNOLOGY PARTNER IN 8BASE

These constraints led Jones to partner with 8base. After evaluating numerous development shops, he found that only 8base had the on-site technical services and robust platform to bring his SaaS platform to life in a rapid, scalable way.

It all starts with the 8base platform and its suite of turnkey back-end services.
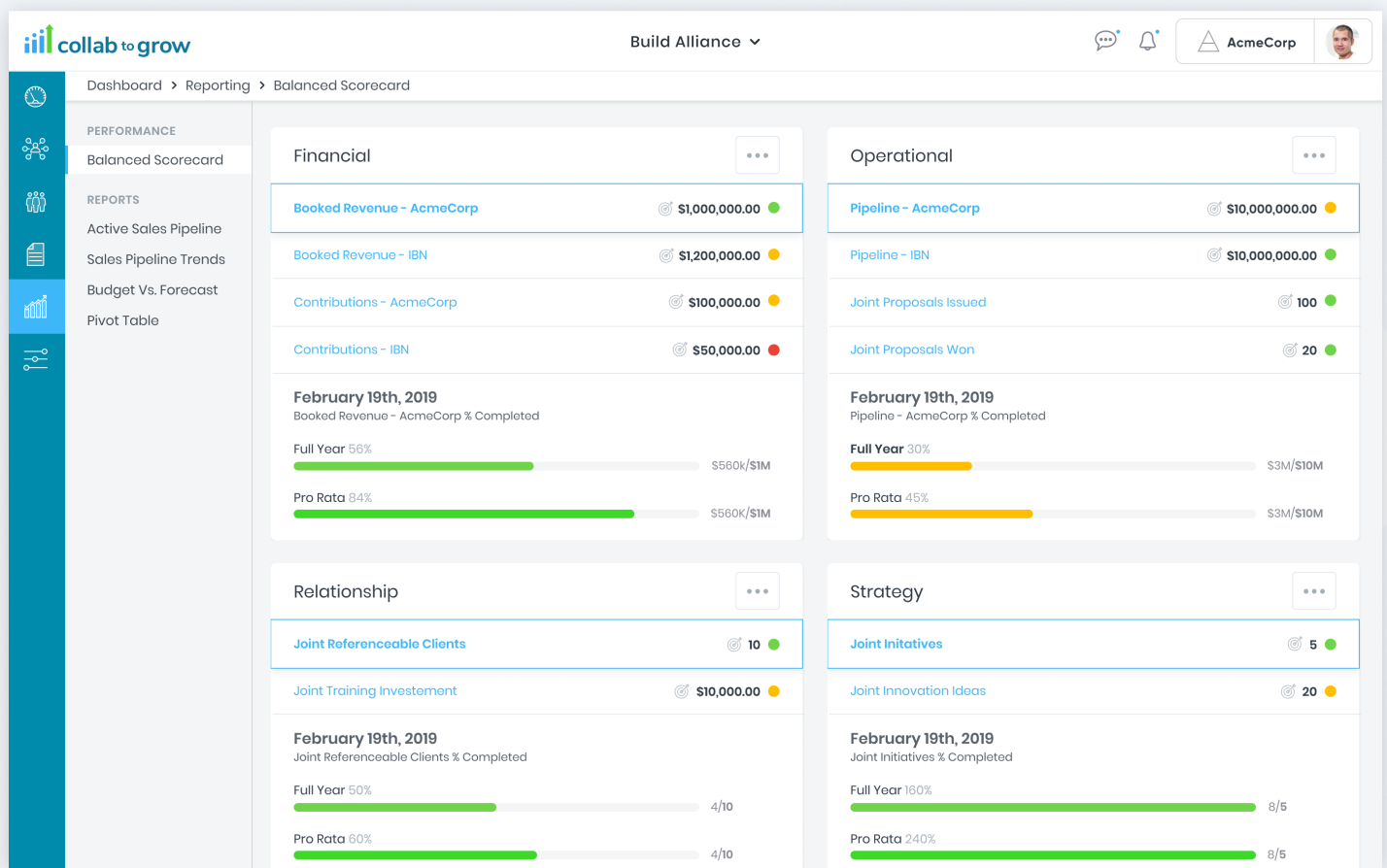
PLUG–AND–PLAY PLATFORM, BUILT TO SCALE

"Most of the back–end services are prebuilt and portable, like the database system, role management and user authorization. But who wants to deal with all that?" asks Jones.

"These services are necessary, but they don't add much value to my platform. With 8base, these aspects are already baked in the cake and are part of the back–end chassis."

Jones adds that 8base's relationship to AWS was also a key factor in his partnership decision. Usually, entrepreneurs have to find a partner to write code and then face the monumental task of delivering it from development into a hosted production environment. This is where many prototypes and minimum viable products (MVPs) break and are often unable to scale up to production–level traffic.

Online security is another crucial element. Since strategic alliances are all about trust, the two partners must share a faith that the SaaS platform they'll be collaborating on is a safe home for sensitive and proprietary information. This is another area where 8base rose above the rest. Their AWS hosted environment already adheres to many compliance requirements, a necessary element for entrepreneurs in the B2B space.

"8base being built on top of AWS is a game-changer when you're trying to quickly bring something to the market," Jones says. "You can't underestimate having scalability and security integrated with a world–class cloud provider."

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES AS AN EXTENSION OF YOUR TEAM

The 8base services team bring skills that go beyond typical software developer abilities and can become an extension of your team.

This, coupled with their extensive knowledge, makes them a partner that entrepreneurs can lean on.

Jones says that many other development shops offered to build a working prototype rather than a full-blown application. "I know what 'working prototype' means," he says with a rueful grin. "You're going to have to throw everything away as soon as you begin to scale."

The collabtogrow team that their MVP wouldn't be a prototype in 8base's hands, but a truly viable product. It would be a SaaS platform that could be extended with subsequent releases instead of needing to be rewritten completely, and it would scale in a real-world production environment.

Jones also says that while his own team had a great business vision, they had not really fleshed out any kind of user interface or user experience. They knew what the features they needed, not the best way to present them online. This is where the 8base services team really showed their stuff. Jones describes working with the designers as a very collaborative and iterative process, noting that the 8base team focuses on elegant design. In demos with prospects, Jones says they received fantastic feedback about the look and feel of the platform.

"The whole concept behind 8base, from development to design, is to jump-start products for the real world," Jones believes.

PARTNER DOWN THE ROAD

While many entrepreneurs are interested primarily in launching and scaling their business, Jones' CIO perspective helps him focus on an often-overlooked part of the business: software maintenance and enhancements.

This may not be as exciting as building and launching a product, but it is crucial to the bottom line. After all, if your SaaS platform buggy, outdated, or unreliable, your customers will flee.

"Our initial version of collabtogrow Succeed™ is very feature-rich, thanks to 8base," Jones says, "but there are already new features we want to add. This is not like the old days, with an annual software release—customers are expecting continuous enhancements. Every SaaS product needs a roadmap and the ability to integrate improvements with minimal downtime."

Jones believes the partnership with 8base will be vital once collabtogrow gets to that steady-state mode of operation. He also has faith that the 8base developers will continue to invest in the performance and optimization of their 8base platform as well as enhance the integration of 8base with AWS and other third-party software providers—such as Salesforce—via API integrations.

Jones can see that the 8base services team has an intimate understanding of the collabtogrow platform and is invested in its success beyond launch. This makes 8base, he says, "a partner we can take down the road."

A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR COLLABTOGROW

With their platform recently launched, Jones hopes to have thousands of customers on collabtogrow in the near future.

He says that there are hundreds of thousands of small to medium-sized companies in the US alone that rely on strategic alliances, and he believes that collabtogrow can help them bring alliance management into the 21st century.

Jones says that any founder, technical or not, should consider 8base as a software development partner. The company is easy to work with, has highly skilled individuals who truly understood his aspirations and business, and—unlike other vendors he's dealt with—didn't try to "change-order him to death." In fact, he didn't deal with a single change order during the development process.

"We made a conscious decision to not enter the IT space," Jones says, "and 8base is helping us achieve our goals while delivering beautiful, scalable software hosted on a world-class cloud."
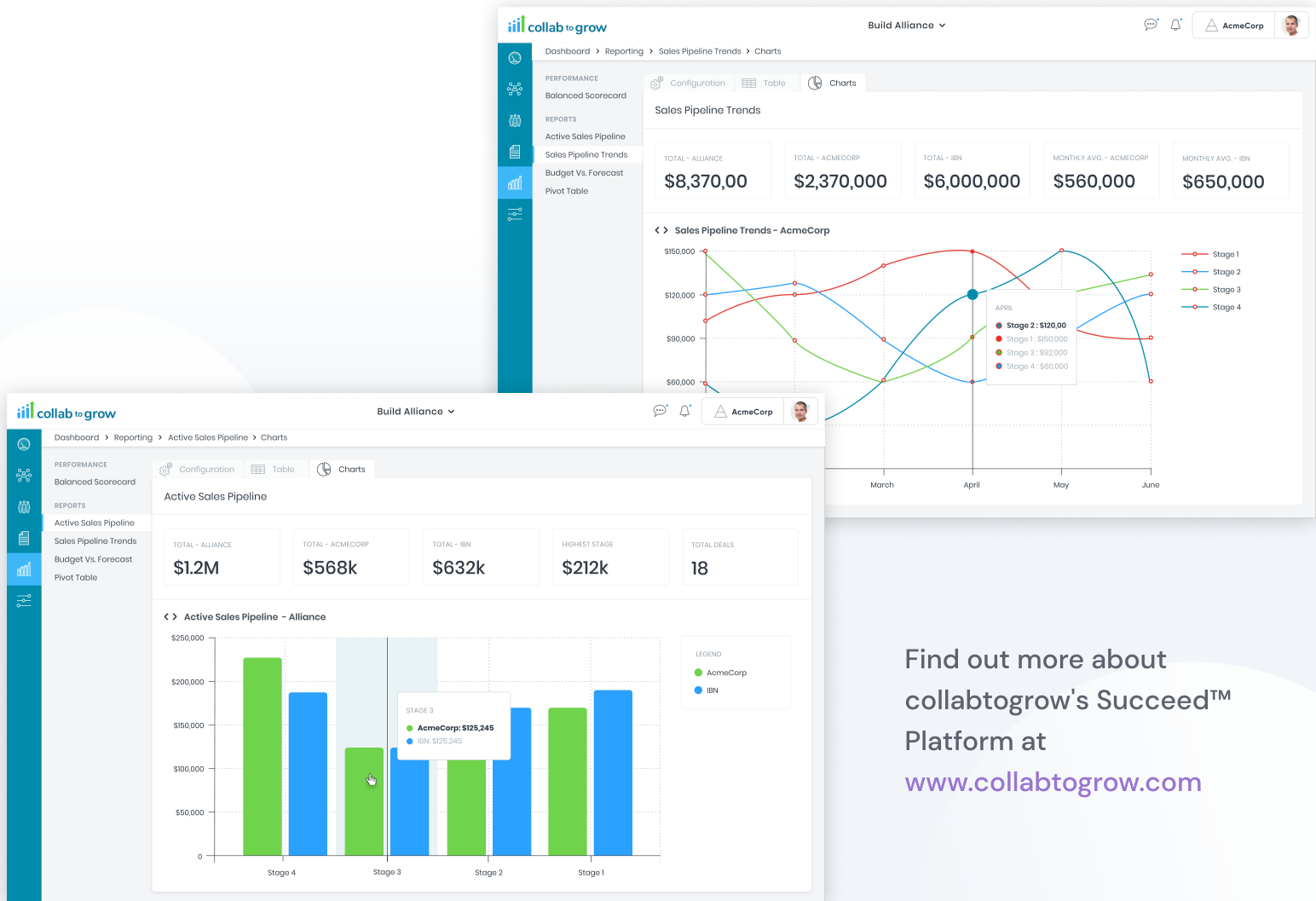
Find out more about collabtogrow's Succeed™ Platform at
www.collabtogrow.com

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