

The Alliancesphere Story

*Connect the Dots. Accelerate Time-to-Value.
Execute End-to-End.*

“**T**O COMPETE AND WIN IN the 21st century, businesses will need to continuously make tough ‘build, buy, partner’ decisions across their value chain network,” says **Lorin Coles**, CEO and managing director of Alliancesphere. “To create sustained shareholder and stakeholder value, they must collaborate effectively—internally and externally—at all levels and functions across their business life cycle.”

Coles is trying to encapsulate the thinking that makes Alliancesphere unique, and what differentiates the Atlanta-based consulting company not only from traditional management consultants, but also from other consultancies working in alliance management—a space that is growing exponentially, but which is still little known and poorly understood, even in the business world.

And in a challenging business landscape where the few established consultancies in this emerging field tend to focus narrowly on clients’ alliance management practices, and where the traditional consulting firms lack the hands-on experience and specialized, in-depth expertise needed to execute strategic partnerships, Alliancesphere combines the two worlds by developing a high-functioning alliance management capability that integrates into the overall business strategy and day-to-day operations of the larger organization.

Collaboration doesn’t come naturally to all organizations—even to such high-profile Alliancesphere clients as Hewlett-Packard, Microsoft, Intel, Cisco, NetApp, and The Coca-Cola Company. To successfully implement and execute on alliances, companies themselves need a trusted partner, and Alliancesphere’s unique set of capabilities and offerings make it the partner of choice for companies that do business via collaboration.

Not Your Typical Alliance Consultant

“When we define alliances, we mean more than just the typical business partner alliance,” says **Deb Barnard**, who cofounded Alliancesphere



with Coles in 2002 and is now the company’s president and managing director. “We also include customers, the consumers of customers, partner ecosystems, and even cross-business groups within a company, which often include functions such as sales, marketing, and product management. Aligning and sustaining those relationships to ensure synergy requires management and a governance process to achieve the desired results.

“Many companies’ growth and innovation strategies rely on strategic partnerships, in addition to M&A and organic growth, to achieve their overall

goals. Increasingly, companies are anticipating and expecting more out of alliances than ever before. But with an average of 61 percent of those alliances not meeting expectations or delivering on the desired results, companies are turning to us to help improve their ability to achieve the outcomes envisioned in their strategic plans.”

So how does Alliancesphere approach and work with its clients?

“First, we try to be a company that’s easy to do business with—adaptable to clients’ business models, aligning to their needs and budget,” Coles explains. “The second thing is, we’re not a transaction-based organization, we are relation-

ship based—we’re not ‘drive-bys,’ we’re not about just doing a project, that’s not the way we work. We believe that at the core we create value, and if you believe you are value-added, then we’re always about accelerating your time-to-value. If you have a goal, we believe we can get you there better, faster, and more efficiently.

“Third, we’re all about *empowering* our clients.

Empowering is the greatest manifestation of what we can do for you—it’s way beyond just ‘enabling.’ We are not consult-*to*, we are consult-*with*—we are working *with* you.”

Or, as one Alliancesphere client describes it, “Some consultants

come in and say how complex your problem is, ‘so let me solve it for you.’ Alliancesphere’s staff is much more collaborative.” And according to another client, an executive at a major software company, the strength of Alliancesphere’s approach to working with clients is that “it’s logical, it makes sense, and it’s easy to engage with—because it’s straightforward.”

Juggling Monkeys, with an Elephant on the Table

Alliancesphere sets itself apart with its singular and relentless focus on collaborative execution,

“They’re local and a small, hungry, unique consulting firm. To me their sweet spot is this collaborative innovation as they call it—to bring big companies together and get traction somehow.”

Senior Operations Executive,
Global Consumer Products Company

and by working “shoulder to shoulder,” as Coles says, with its clients. Another key feature of Alliancesphere is that it’s neither a huge, faceless company with a front line of senior executives closing the deal and then giving way to squads of junior consultants who actually engage with the client, nor is it just a “one-man band.” Instead, Coles and Barnard have surrounded themselves with a richly talented “dream team,” whose diverse skills and decades of consulting and other business experience helps them empathize with clients’ problems and design on-target programs that deliver measurable results.

As Barnard sees it, Alliancesphere’s crucial difference lies in both its flexibility in client engagements and the broad, “holistic view” it takes of alliances, which allows it to “connect the dots” on the fly for its clients in order to drive alliance success throughout organizations and partner ecosystems. But as Barnard notes, “In order to connect the dots, you first have to see them—not just for insights, but for execution. In other words, how is this going to land?”



To which Coles adds, “Our strength lies in identifying, and then connecting, the dots that others haven’t thought about. We see the landmines—we sense the things that are going on that put you at risk if you aren’t aligned, then we help you work through the relevant parts of your organization to navigate the rough spots.”

Barnard stresses the importance of Alliancesphere’s role in not simply offering Band-Aid solutions, but acting as an instrumental third party—“not a neutral third party, not Switzerland,” she says, but a party that is willing and able at all

times to drive and facilitate the tough conversations that need to happen within an organization and between partners. She calls it “putting the elephant on the table”—which, as she cheerfully adds, mixing various animal, vegetable, and carbohydrate metaphors, can turn into “herding bees and juggling monkeys, or pushing wet spaghetti uphill.” Nevertheless, it’s in those tough conversations, and the equally tough, ongoing follow-up moments—doing the hard work and rolling up their sleeves for the long haul—that the Alliancesphere team thrives and shines.

And their clients recognize and appreciate it. “There’s always a natural benefit of the third party,” says one executive in the IT industry. “They drive to some alignment, to transparency. That third-party, outsider’s perspective allows that.” Another IT leader and Alliancesphere client puts an inside-out spin on it. “It enables them to have a view of being almost like an insider for the work that we need them to do,” he says. “They know our product lines, know our services business, they have built systems specifically for [our alliance]. They are really like an extended member of our team.”

Accelerating Time to Value

Coles describes what Alliancesphere does as “change management,” presented to clients using a flexible approach that is able to provide a multitude of services, custom-tailored to exactly what the client needs. “Getting teams ready, aligning interests, planning, implementing the plan, governing the process: that’s what we do,” he says. “We do it on the worldwide, regional, industry, and solutions levels, and we can connect all those to sales. We help clients drive sales through that last mile, get the first win in the market, and roll it out to their various accounts. You might call it ‘program management facilitation,’ but we are not just the facilitator. We provide methodology, program management, or facilitation, or all three—with a solution that scales, from high-touch to low-touch, depending on client need.”

Barnard notes that “Alliancesphere has hundreds of collaborations over its nine years, and has created a methodology that covers everything from pulling things out of the ashes to making good alliances better to fixing stuck problems, etc. So our consulting style is not oriented around an ‘event’ but rather is an ongoing process with a skill set. Yet at the same time, in a single meeting, we can actually transform a

“Everybody wants to get closer to customers, and I think that’s a big thing Alliancesphere has to claim: their value proposition clearly is their insight into customers and [their] internal insight. They have good customer contacts, so they know the pain points, strategies, and future plans of the customers.”

“If there are [GMs or VPs] in the room, they are really able to handle these characters.

They have strong, strong profiles.

Alliance managers have problems because they can be lower in the hierarchy—it can be hard to tell those guys to move on. You have all kinds of escalation and discussion. Alliancesphere is able to handle them.”

EMEA Alliance Director,

Leading Global Software Company

relationship and accelerate it in eight hours—maybe even one hour, to begin the process. It’s an immediate demonstration of value—sometimes before the first meeting even takes place.”

“It’s all about context,” Coles explains. “We have enormous empathy for alliance people in their role. It’s a herculean task, when you understand the scope of what people are asked to do in an alliance job. If you look at a ‘day in the life’ of an alliance manager, they don’t have the luxury to see the forest from the trees. But we’re able to see it, to bring an additional perspective, and we bring our experience to bear on it as well. Sometimes we’re bringing them answers to problems they may not know even about, because we’re touching their team so broadly.

“We’ve facilitated close to a thousand collaborative planning sessions with multiple Fortune 500 companies,” Coles continues. “It’s about capabilities development, piloting with the client, helping to figure things out and look at it overall, holistically, to work on transformation. Let’s face it, getting two or more separate entities to collaborate entails hard work that others internally may not be overly eager to do—you need to really make a difference so the reward outweighs the risks.”

Ideas on the Fly and Implementation to Go

Coles and Barnard are both very smart people who work together well and complement each other, often in amazing ways. Their colleague **Shawn Russell** describes Coles as “incredibly gifted. He’s

the bee bouncing around from different flowers and pollinating—but he loves the meeting, loves brainstorming and creating models and innovative approaches on the fly, being provocative.” In short, Coles is the creative problem solver—but as one quickly learns, Alliancesphere is a fertile, creative place where breakthrough solutions are never in short supply.

As Barnard explains, “Lorin and I are a good partnership—whereas he is the big dreamer and thinker, I can understand the models he develops and translate them into implementation. I’m a creative person, but pragmatic—a doer, a person of action. We are pretty aligned: I can see and dream like he does, but I don’t dream in the same colors that he does, and also there’s a bit of me that can take that dream down to reality. People who know us and watch us work know that we are very strong together.”

The son of a chocolate chip cookie magnate—his father, Michael Coles, founded the Great American Cookie Co. in 1973—Lorin Coles took a different career path. After graduating from the University of Georgia with a degree in business, he ended up compiling a résumé featuring more than a decade of experience in alliances, from his time at NCR to his tenure as senior vice president of alliances for iXL, which eventually merged with Scient—largely on the strength of its alliances program. In his years as an alliance executive, Coles saw both good and bad alliances firsthand and was able to distill what it took to build a world-class alliances organization into a succinct set of thoughts, tools, and ideas that now form the backbone of Alliancesphere’s offerings.

Barnard, a transplanted New Englander now living in Atlanta, boasts a 25-year career—much of it spent with Digital Equipment Corporation/Compaq—that includes sales, sales management, change management, and driving and managing sales training for Fortune 500 companies. Fortuitously, an outgoing call placed by one of the best-run alliances in the technology industry set in motion a process that culminated in her initial meeting with Coles, thus creating the beginnings of what has become Alliancesphere.

Today, Coles and Barnard are joined by principals Russell, **Ramesh Subramaniam**, **Sean Taylor**, and **Andrew Burke**, as well as other executives who round out their core team of more than 20 alliance consultants—each a senior executive with decades of experience in alliances and business management. Furthermore, this functional

headcount can double or triple overnight by leveraging Alliancesphere’s TAPn partner network, which provides the global scale as well as the specific types of expertise required for each client engagement.

They Get It

If asked to summarize what differentiates Alliancesphere in three words, Barnard and Coles would both say, “Execution, execution, execution.”

“In terms of execution, most people, most partnerships, most everybody likes to fly under the radar,” says Barnard. “They don’t want to be held accountable to what they’ve committed to. So we have to introduce realism and pragmatism. If every company has a build/buy/partner strategy, it’s not driving growth and behavior change unless you have a way to change the mindset, keep it on track, and be accountable—and alliance management doesn’t always have the resources to manage that. Just by engaging us, we’re going to help you drive what would have been unrealized revenue.”

This is where Alliancesphere’s collaborative, “consult-with” approach differentiates it from other consultancies that focus on the evaluation of a problem and the dispensing of advice to remedy it—thereby leaving clients on their own for implementation.

Coles emphasizes the immediate applicability of Alliancesphere’s work and the translation of its analysis into actionable, hands-on process management.

“When we speak to clients, I think one of our strengths is that we can dissect what’s going on in a very short period of time,” he says. “Because we’ve been on all sides of the table, we truly do feel their pain, and we can help them. What we do is, we shape a concept or a set of ideas for how we would engage, we give them a sense of our understanding and analysis of the situation, propose a set of solutions, and say, ‘Here’s how we would get started.’ Typically, our clients feel like, they get it. They can see that we’ve done this before, we know what we’re talk-



Deb Barnard

“Deb and her colleagues at Alliancesphere have worked with my team for several years in literally hundreds of engagements. They have deep expertise in account team alignment, strategic out-of-the-box thinking, and are well respected by both companies’ sales and management teams. Personally, Deb is great to work with; she has high energy, delivers excellent work, and provides strong leadership in difficult situations while remaining very personable. She is someone whom I would recommend without hesitation to any alliances organization seeking the best professional consulting uniquely focused on our profession. And she demands the same from her entire staff.”

“Lorin is a guy who thinks in pictures, big concepts, on top of the latest trends. He’ll ask provocative questions, how you can use social media, add zeros to the deal to enlarge it. We dig into those issues and do true 18-month strategic planning, which is unusual for a sales team.”

*Americas Alliance Director,
Leading Global IT Company*



Lorin Coles

ing about, and we’re going to lead them to the right place.”

Key Players on the Alliancesphere Team

Bob Butler, client partner, joined Alliancesphere in 2009, having retired from IBM with more than 30 years of sales and alliance management experience. While at IBM, Bob helped forge many channel and alliance partnerships in a number of groundbreaking initiatives, such as IBM’s entry into UNIX, eBusiness, and Linux. His first encounter with Lorin Coles led eventually to his current work with Alliancesphere, though it took some time. “I met Lorin when he was an alliance executive at iXL in 1999,” Butler recalls. “I was impressed with him then and I had kept up with him since he founded Alliancesphere almost 10 years ago. When I retired from IBM, it was a no-brainer to work for a person of his caliber.” Butler graduated from Auburn University with a

marketing degree, having also lettered in football. In his current position with Alliancesphere, Bob wears dual hats, performing both consulting and business development roles.

Alliancesphere principal **Shawn Russell** came to Alliancesphere early on, in 2003—"I was employee number four," he says—and like Coles graduated from the University of Georgia, although ironically they did not meet there, even though they were next-door neighbors at one point, both business majors, and had friends in the same fraternities. Russell has an MBA from Emory University and Johannes Kepler Universität in Austria, and before joining Alliancesphere served, among other roles, as director of account management for WebMD's alliance with Microsoft, its largest strategic partner. In that position, Russell was responsible for executing the joint strategy and marketing plan to demonstrate the value of Microsoft and WebMD technology.

Ramesh Subramaniam, Alliancesphere's chief strategist, was formerly vice president of marketing and business development for Mead (now MeadWestvaco Consumer Solutions Group) in Asia-Pacific and Latin America. He holds MBAs from the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business and the Indian Institute of Management and has a degree in engineering from the National Institute of Technology in India. He speaks French, Japanese, and several

Indian languages, and has enough Spanish to confidently order tapas in Madrid. With his expertise in cross-cultural communications and negotiations, he has authored several publications in leading business journals.

Andrew Burke's career trajectory sounds like a success story that might have been highlighted by Garrison Keillor on Prairie Home Companion in a sketch about the fictitious Professional Organization of English Majors (POEM). Although he holds both bachelor's and master's degrees in English from Texas A&M University, and pursued a Ph.D. in English (ABD) at the University of Georgia, the Alliancesphere principal is, in addition, a skilled consultant who brings more than 17 years of communication, training, and alliances experience to his work with the company. Prior to joining Alliancesphere, Burke served as director of alliances and analyst relations for Scient (formerly iXL, Inc.), where he met Lorin Coles. At Scient, Burke was responsible for developing and managing strategic worldwide partner relationships within an alliance portfolio of leading software companies, including Verity, ISS, Aspect, Mercator, and Epicentric.

Sean Taylor, client partner, graduated from the University of Virginia with a degree in government and foreign affairs, and thereupon embarked on a 17-year career in business

"They are great at account planning—and alliance planning. They've got a good logical flow around that—thinking through things from objectives going down to specific action items and deliverables. [It's] the way they outline from a vision to a strategy all the way down to the action items within the next three months."

*Senior Alliance Director,
Leading Global Software Company*

development, sales, account management, and marketing. His responsibilities have included working with executives and senior management to identify and pursue strategic and tactical opportunities to achieve revenue objectives and manage strategic partner relationships. He also has prior experience working with Alliancesphere principals as a founding member of iXL's alliance team. Prior to joining Alliancesphere, Taylor managed the Atlanta office of Schematic, a Los Angeles-based industry-leading agency in interface design, interactive production, and software development. Before Schematic, he was director of alliances at AgentWare, an e-business enabling software company focused on delivering Web-based data aggregation services for the travel and hospitality industries. ■



Plan. Execute. Transform.

Keep your best-laid collaborative plans on track.

All too often, even the best-laid alliance plans run astray upon implementation because **the ability to execute is an afterthought**.

Plan with execution in mind. Your collaborative vision can't bear fruit without the ability to execute. We work hand-in-hand with our clients to identify goals, jointly develop partnership strategy, design programs, and execute them in the field – supporting the entire alliance lifecycle from inception to realization.

Execute with the customer in sight. Alliancesphere's approach builds a bridge between the collaborative vision of your board room and the front lines where alliances ultimately succeed or fail. Our proven frameworks empower your organization to execute.

Transform with confidence. Alliancesphere's approach empowers our clients to drive billions of dollars in collaborative revenues each year, across the Americas and around the world.

Realize your collaborative vision. Empower your organization to succeed. Contact Alliancesphere today at +1-404-607-7620, info@alliancesphere.com, or visit www.alliancesphere.com.



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