

APRIL 2020

collabtogrow Case Study

See how 8base helped the founders of collabtogrow to do more with less and bring to life a powerful multi-tenant SaaS product for managing strategic alliances.

Multi-Tenant SaaS

B2B Collaboration

Process Management

Financial Management

CRM Integration

ERP Integration

Document Management

Business Intelligence

Balanced Scorecard





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

By leveraging each other's strengths, technologies and market positions, companies can become greater than the sum of their parts. Robert "Bob" 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managed using archaic spreadsheets and presentations that were inaccessible to many stakeholders and often contained out-of-date information.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 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 solve 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 due to one of three 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

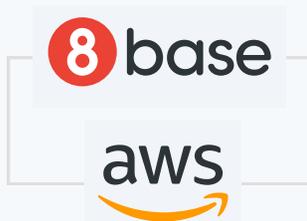
The magnitude of the alliance is not recognized by one or both parties, so appropriate infrastructure is not put in place; these are very large projects and programs that need proper project management best practices.

“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.

The solution to the challenge, Jones believes, is having all that 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—giving the C-level executive or any alliance team member the ability to see the overall health of the partnership in real-time.



Developing collabtogrow 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 “Bob” Jones is a technology expert.



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

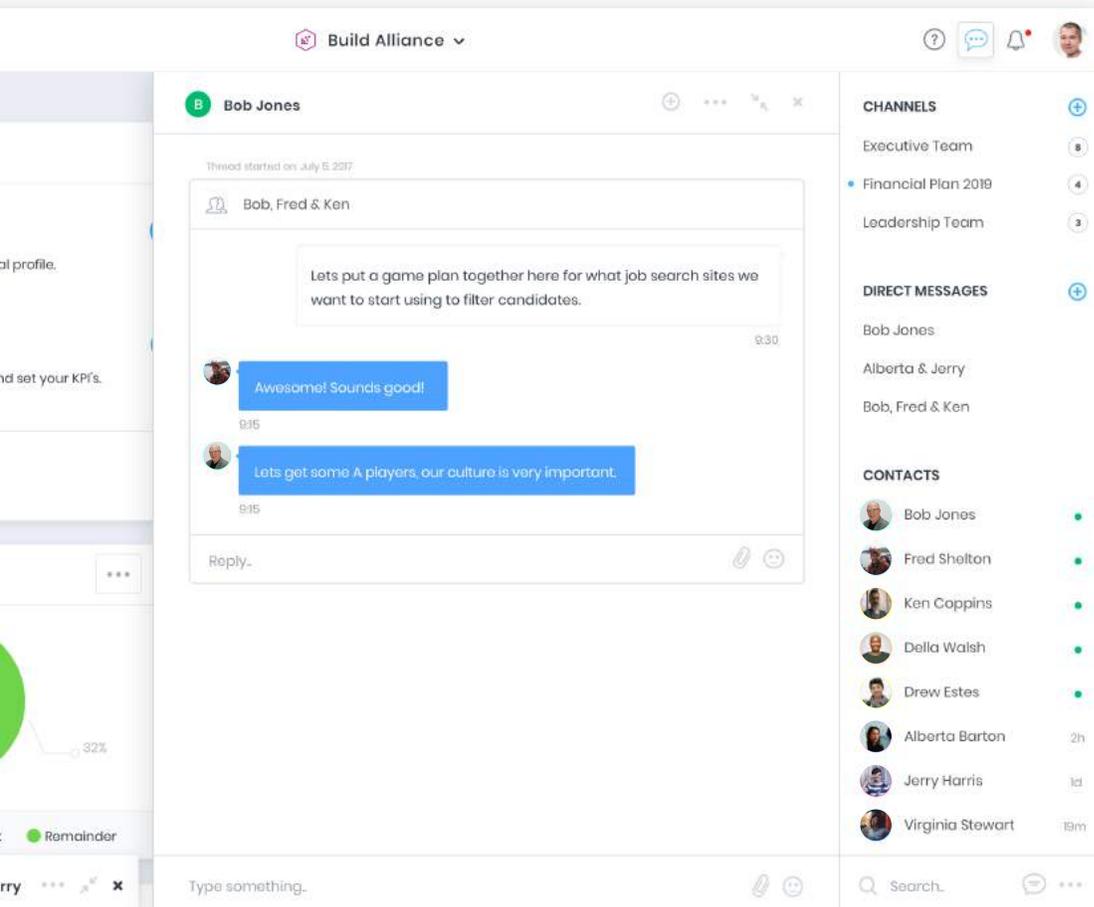
“I’ve been a CIO. I didn’t want to be in the IT business again managing 500 people, and clearly we didn’t want to have a six-figure software developer on the payroll early on,” joked Jones. “collabtogrow needed a technology partner that could provide deep technical expertise, software development and 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 to a third party. The team looked at traditional on-shore development shops and off-shore development companies. In particular, finding a partner that could take advantage of low-code or prebuilt components was crucial for the tech-savvy Jones, who knows that customization always results in additional work.

“Less code is always better. It’s more stable, easier to maintain and quicker to troubleshoot. I have always been a proponent of simple, easy-to-understand code, going back to the fourth-generation programming language (4GL) movement that resulted in many of the object-oriented languages of today,” Jones recalls.

Finally, as a technologist, Jones understands the discrete parts of building a SaaS application. While many non-technical entrepreneurs are focused solely on the development of their platform, Jones knows that you must also consider the system administration and online hosting of the application in addition to 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 without having on-staff technical resources, develop an extendable platform that could help them rapidly go to market, and work with one partner to develop, host and maintain the application at a reasonable cost.

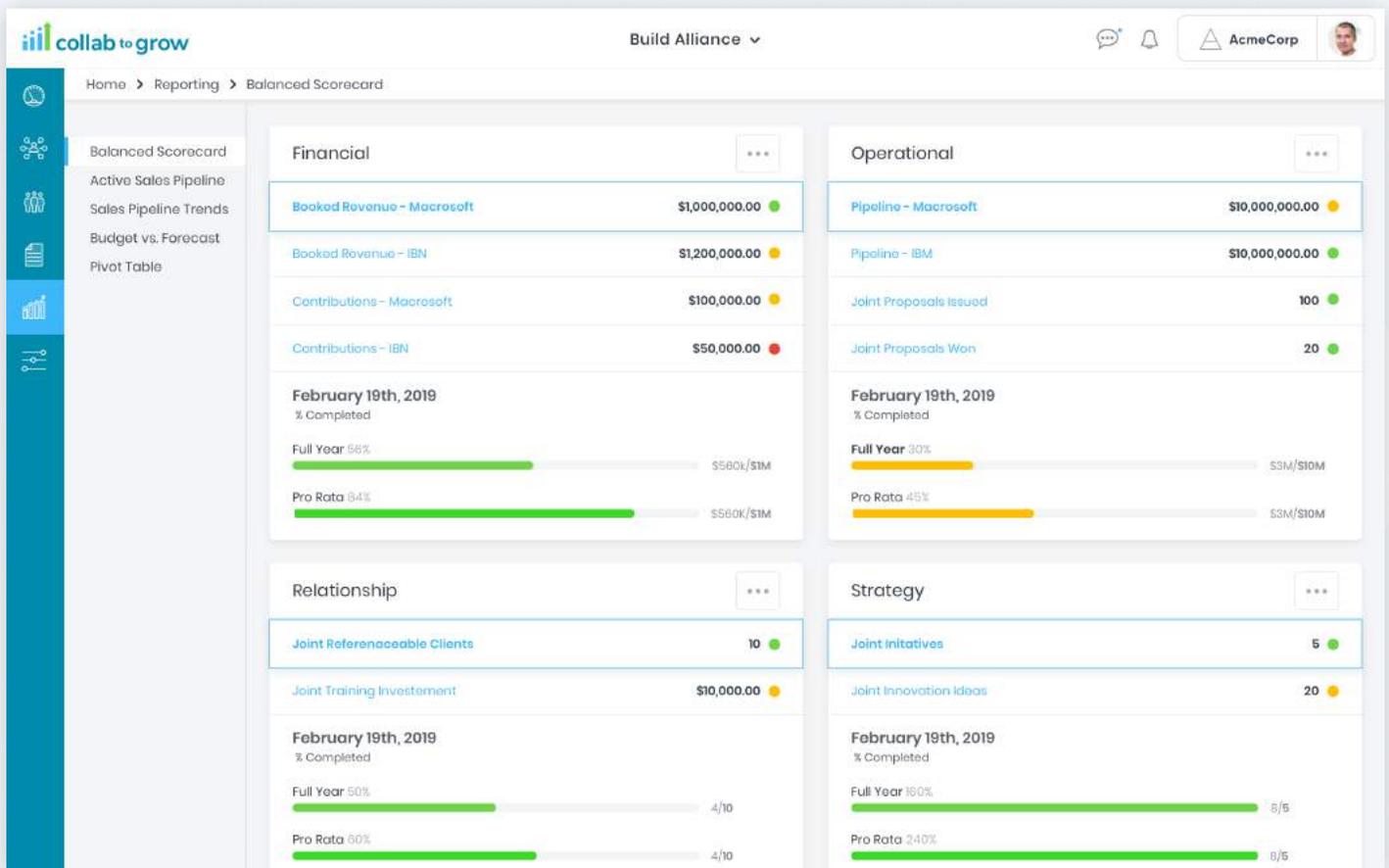


collabtogrow has rich collaboration capabilities built in that empower stakeholders across the alliance value chain to manage success in realtime.

FINDING A TRUSTED TECHNOLOGY PARTNER IN 8BASE

These constraints are what ultimately led Jones to partner with 8base. After looking at 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, which is full of back-end services that are ready out of the box.



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 prominent decision making factor. Usually, entrepreneurs have to find a partner to write code and then face the difficult task of bringing it out of a development environment 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.

Another issue that comes with hosting is online security. Since strategic alliances are all about trust, the two partners have to have faith that the SaaS platform they’ll be collaborating on is a safe place to put important information. This is where the 8base became so important. 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 offers. “You can’t underestimate having scalability and security integrated with a world-class cloud provider.”

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES AS AN EXTENSION OF YOUR TEAM



Members of the 8base services team have skills that go beyond typical software developer abilities. They have the capacity to truly understand your business and become an extension of your team.

This, coupled with their extensive knowledge of the 8base platform and serverless technologies, makes them a partner that entrepreneurs can lean on.

Jones says that many development shops offered to build a working prototype rather than a full-blown application. “I know what ‘working prototype’ means,” he says with a tinge of sarcasm. “You’re going to have to throw everything away as soon as you begin to scale.”

Things were different with 8base. It became clear to the collabtogrow team that their MVP wouldn’t be a prototype, 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 the team had a great business vision, they had not really fleshed out any kind of user interface or user experience. They knew what the feature functions needed to be but didn’t know 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, saying 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



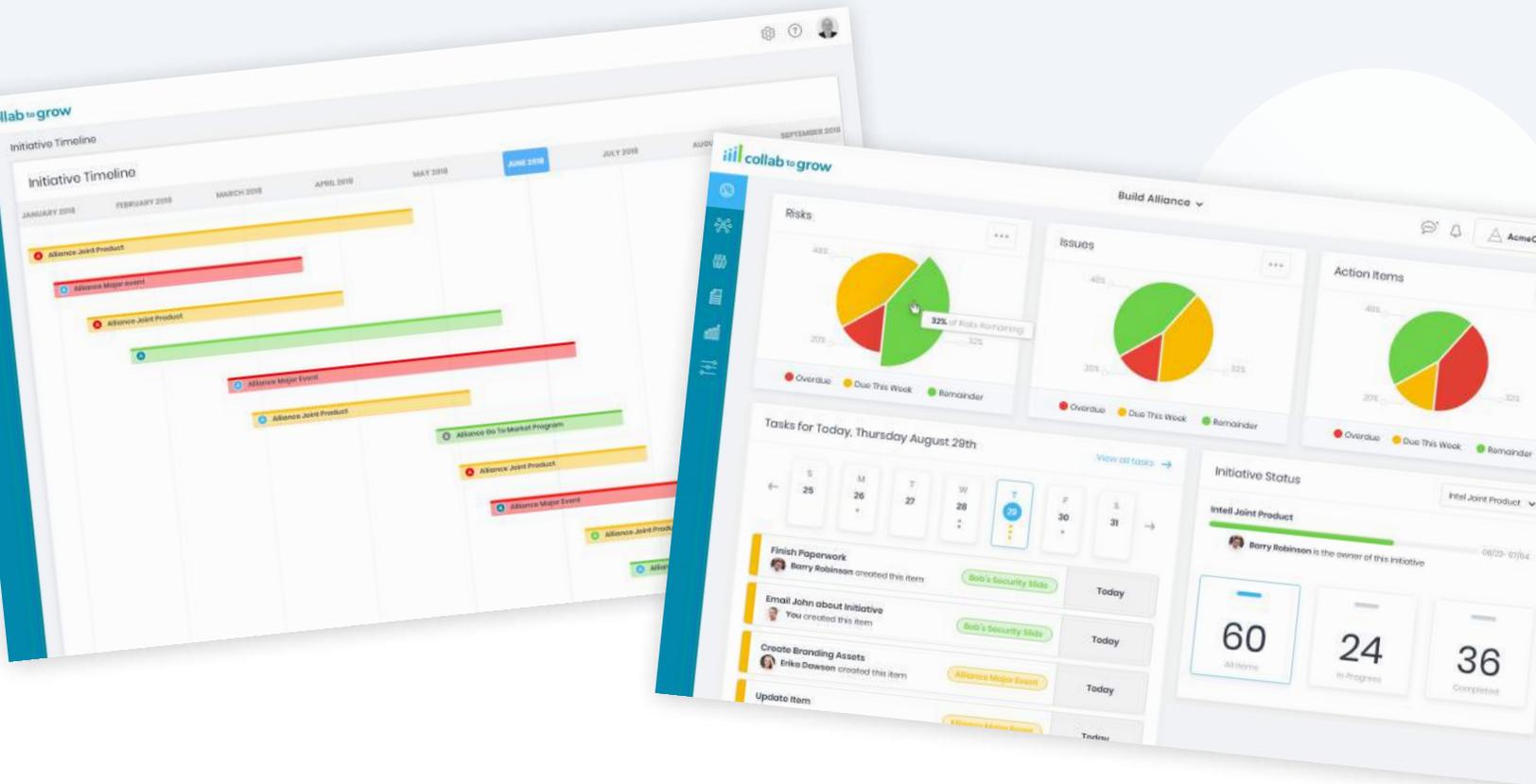
While many entrepreneurs are interested primarily in launching and scaling their business, the CIO perspective of Jones has him focused on an often-overlooked part of the business: software maintenance and enhancements.

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 is buggy, outdated or unreliable, your business will hemorrhage customers.

“Our initial version of collabtogrow is very feature rich, thanks to 8base,” Jones offers. “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. Further, 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

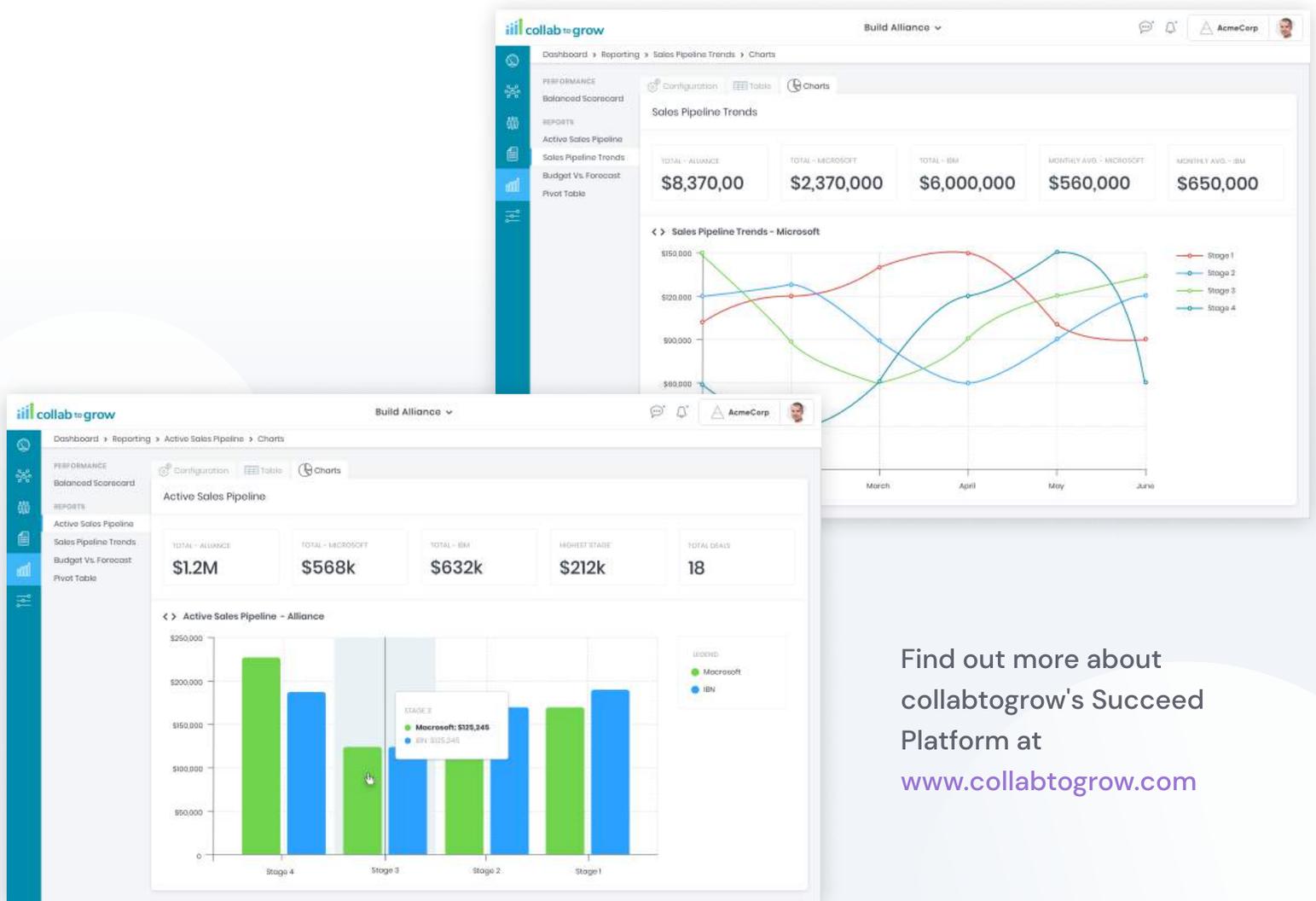


With their platform recently launched, Jones hopes to have thousands of customers on collabto grow in the near future.

He says that there are hundreds of thousands of small- to medium-size companies in the US alone that rely on strategic alliances, and he believes that collabto grow 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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