



Is Your Channel Marketing Program Boosting Your Business?

(We Know How to Make Sure It Does)

Channel marketing isn't as innovative or sexy as some industry tools and tactics making headlines today. But, done right, it's a consistently reliable way to increase sales and boost revenue while building relationships that will have channel partners shouting from the rooftops about how great you – and your product – are.

What's the catch?



You have to do it right – and many companies aren't.

Partners and resellers constitute the most lucrative distribution channel to help B2B organizations reach new customers. When channel partner relationships are managed correctly, partners act as an extension of your marketing team, helping to quickly grow and expand your audience. But partner marketing is a distinct function and should not be treated the same as marketing directly to your buyers. Unfortunately, many vendors fail to recognize this distinction and end up delivering campaigns that fall flat.

This comprehensive channel marketing playbook starts at the very beginning and walks you through each stage of developing a killer partner marketing program – from choosing the right partners to creating content that keeps audiences coming back for more, from building a partner portal to measuring the ROI of your efforts. It's all here.

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Let's Start with the Basics: What is Partner Marketing?

Partner marketing is an arrangement between two or more businesses (or a business and an opinion leader, influencer, or other individual) where all parties work together to help the other achieve their marketing objectives.

(Really, it's a somewhat overused term that means one business or person is helping another sell their products or services, and vice versa.)

Did You Know?

Organizations that leverage partner marketing will invest **40% of their overall marketing budget** on partner initiatives this year – up from 37% in 2019.



Partner marketing can take many forms:

Affiliate (or ambassador) marketing

Channel marketing

Value-added reselling

Co-marketing or co-branding

Distribution partnerships

Referral programs

Sponsorships

Licensing agreements

This guide focuses primarily on channel marketing (the principles of which also apply to value-added reselling), but some of the guidance can also be used in other forms of partner marketing.

What is Channel Marketing?

Channel marketing is a form of partner marketing that involves working with businesses like distributors or resellers who sell your products to end customers. It allows organizations to benefit from their partners' networks, marketing channels, customer bases, and resources.



Why You Need to Care About Channel Partner Marketing



Partner marketing is an essential tool in the B2B marketer's arsenal. Companies that invest strategically in channel marketing initiatives benefit in a variety of ways:

Cost savings



Creating a single campaign and offloading promotion and distribution to partners is more affordable and effective than doing all the heavy lifting on your own.



Increased efficiency

Leveraging the expertise, skill, and resources of multiple companies with shared goals can lighten the load on each partner's marketing team.



Access to new audiences

Working with a partner gives you automatic access to their audience and, in most cases, the trust they've established with their clients.



Competitive advantage

When you make it easier for channel partners to sell your product, both of you benefit – and you become a more attractive partner they'll want to work with in the future.



Reduced risk

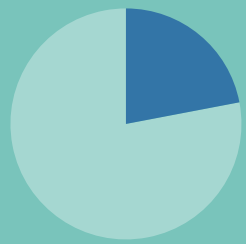
Two heads are better than one. Collaboration with a partner boosts the likelihood of success and can help remove common roadblocks.



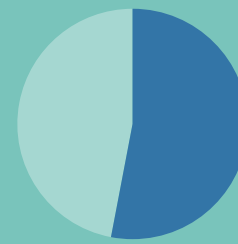
Higher revenue: A successful channel partner marketing campaign drives a sales increase for your partners – more sales for them equals a bump in revenue for you.

Events Deliver Top Partner Marketing Results

The **most successful** partner marketing program elements in the last year were:



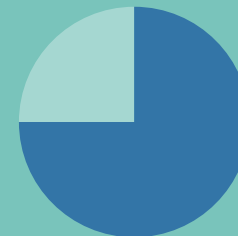
Partner-focused websites
22%



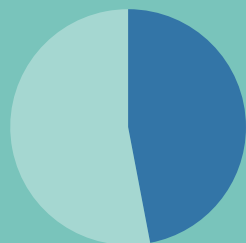
Partner training
53%



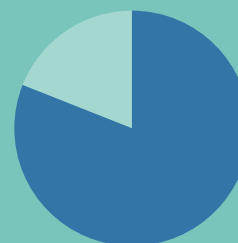
Partner portals
41%



Content assets
75%



Email or social media campaigns
47%



Events and webinars
81%

Channel Marketing Always Delivers. Or Does It?

The benefits of marketing together with channel partners sound pretty sweet. But there's a sharp disconnect between the percentage of companies using partner marketing and those getting value from it.



88%

of marketers agree partner marketing **provides value**

56%

say their partner marketing efforts **have produced results** in the last year

55%

say partner marketing is a **significant or critical** part of their strategy

60%

are **ambivalent, dissatisfied, or deeply dissatisfied** with their partner marketing programs

Most agree partner marketing adds value. More than half say it plays a vital role in their strategy. But many are dissatisfied and not seeing results.



Is channel marketing dead? Should you still be investing money in it – or should you let it go and embrace new tactics?

Here are some of the challenges standing in the way of channel marketing results:

70%

of marketers say getting partners to engage in their program is a challenge

80%

say it's hard to plan and executive channel marketing initiatives within partner funding timelines

22%

report a lack of alignment with partner expectations when measuring success

Source: [Foundry's 2022 Partner Marketing Study](#)

56%

say there is a lack of resources for execution (among partners or vendors)

50%

say they struggle to obtain data needed to measure success

44%

say partners lack the focus or commitment required for execution

Source: [Tendo's 2022 B2B Partner Marketing Insights Report](#)

Channel partner programs are the default — but are they still effective? Should you still be investing time and money in channel partner programs — and if so, how do you make that investment worthwhile?

A Foolproof Way to Build a Killer Channel Partner Program

Here's the thing: valuable doesn't always mean easy. (In fact, it rarely does.) Channel marketing isn't a shortcut to boosting revenue without trying. It requires some thought and effort to achieve the results you've been promised.

Partner Marketing Checklist: Identifying the Issues

If your channel program isn't the runaway success you'd hoped for, ask yourself the following questions.

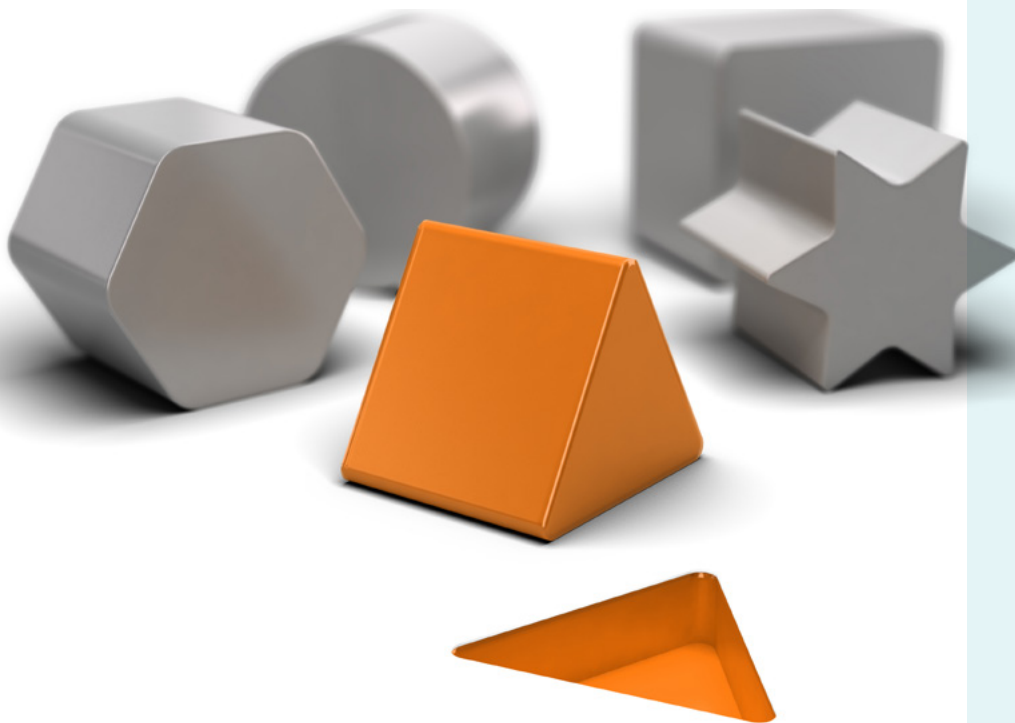
- ✓ Have you chosen the right partners?
- ✓ Are you communicating the value of your program?
- ✓ Is your program better than those offered by your competitors?
- ✓ Have you kept your program simple and straightforward?
- ✓ Do your channel marketing assets deliver value?
- ✓ Is your program easy for partners to use?

If you answered anything but a resounding yes to all of the above, you're on the road to fixing your broken channel program. Let's dig into [how to address the problems](#) associated with each of those questions.



Not Every Partner is the Right Fit

80% of your revenue will come from 20% of your sales efforts. (Some say the rule is closer to 90-10 in channel marketing.) Don't cast a wide net for channel partners — focus on the few that will really deliver a return on what you invest in them.



Look for channel partners that can add value to your channel program:

- ✓ Niche expertise related to your offering
- ✓ A large, loyal customer base
- ✓ Alignment in values and marketing strategy
- ✓ A wealth of marketing or sales resources
- ✓ Geographic location
- ✓ The *IT* factor — you just feel like they're a good fit

Your Partners Need Some Motivation

Yours isn't the only vendor program or initiative your partners have been invited to participate in. They're bombarded with offers from companies just like yours, hoping to build a successful channel marketing program.

They're not going to automatically buy into your channel program just because it's there.

You must make it worth your partners' time to join your program. It has to be drop-dead easy and offer some clear incentives.

What motivates your partners?

- ✓ Financial incentives
- ✓ Customer satisfaction
- ✓ Business development support
- ✓ Increased leads
- ✓ Certifications in your solutions
- ✓ The resources that make it easy to sell your product



You're Still Competing with Other Vendors

Your channel partners probably work with other vendors. *If you think you're the exception to this rule, you're not.* The incentives we discussed in the last step are important – but their value is diminished if your competitors' programs have the same (or better) benefits.

What can you offer to convince partners to engage with *your* channel partner program?

This is not the time for the power of positive thinking. Get in front of a mirror and be honest. What can you offer that sets your channel program apart from others?

(Don't limit yourself to competing on incentives.)

- ✓ Superior content (with demonstrated results)
- ✓ A better onboarding experience
- ✓ A self-service portal

Keep It Simple, Stupid.

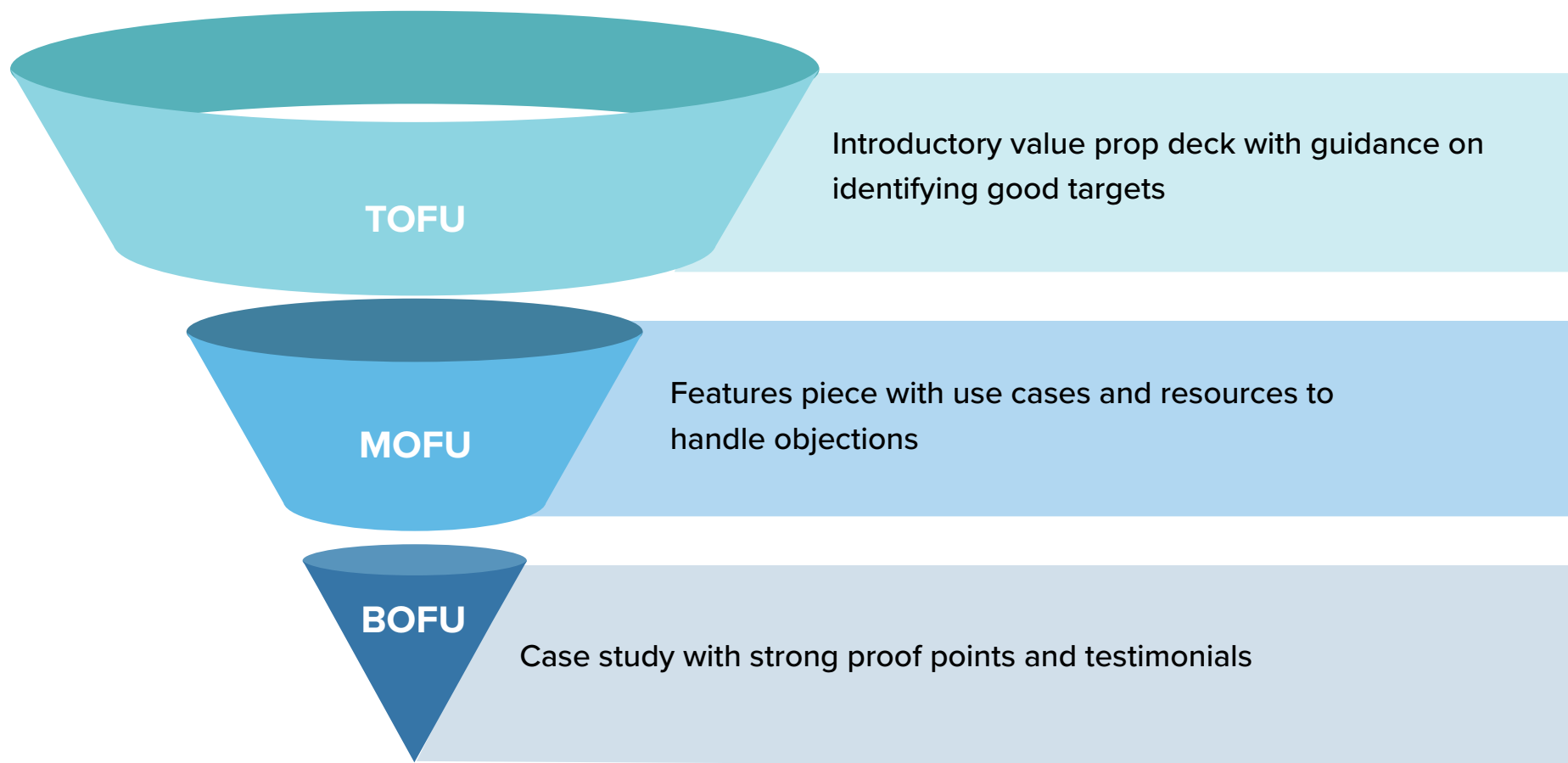
You may have launched your channel marketing programs with big dreams. But getting overly ambitious at the beginning can complicate your strategy, meaning a lot of work and minimal results.

You won't necessarily have the same relationships with each of your channel partners – especially if you have a lot of them. Organizing those relationships based on partner size or engagement can be helpful for prioritization and incentives, but they also increase the complexity of your program. Only add tiers if there is a specific reason to differentiate between partner groups – don't make levels for the sake of having levels.

Quality is More Important Than Quantity

Quality wins over quantity when considering how to build a channel partner program. You don't need to have a million assets ready on day one. Start with content that speaks to the needs of end customers — and make it awesome.

If resources are tight, try offering one piece per funnel stage:



How to Deliver Content Your Partners Will Use

1. Pay attention to what your partners need.

If they're rejecting the partner marketing content you're producing, ask why. Find out what they need and why what you've built isn't cutting it.

2. Don't overlook the importance of the basics.

End customers need data sheets, product information, how-tos, and other resources to help move them along their buying journey. Make sure your partners are educated about your offering and equipped with resources to answer customers' questions.

3. Take a collaborative approach.

Your channel partners might not have the expertise and resources you do, but their direct contact with end users means they have knowledge or experience you don't. Collaboration lets you deliver a well-rounded piece of content certain to engage prospects.

4. Build programs that align with core goals.

Every B2B partner marketing strategy is slightly different, but there are some universal goals that can be applied across all types of B2B partnerships.

- ✓ Business development
- ✓ Brand awareness
- ✓ Partner enablement

No One Wants More Work

Remember what I said about making it easy for partners before? It doesn't stop once you've convinced them to consider your channel partner program. A smooth onboarding program is vital to your success. Don't leave channel partners in the dark about what to do once they engage. Reassure them you're committed to success with tools like:

- Training (documentation, webinars, or in-person)
- FAQs to help them find the answers they need
- Sales plays to simplify the selling process
- Self-serve portals where partners can access marketing resources

Multiply Your Efforts with a Co-Marketing Campaign

Channel marketing programs typically (but not exclusively) put the onus on vendors to develop and supply content to organizations that resell their products. But if your channel partners have the resources and expertise to contribute to a marketing campaign, you may want to experiment with [co-marketing](#) (also known as co-branding).

How is Co-Marketing Different from Channel Marketing?

In a co-marketing campaign, two or more brands work together on creating assets to increase brand awareness, build audience engagement, or boost the perceived value of products or services. Co-marketing can take a variety of forms, including ebooks, email campaigns, or blog posts.

The benefits of partner marketing we discussed above can all apply to co-marketing campaigns – but co-marketing efforts typically also produce more valuable content since assets feature expertise and insights from multiple sources for a more well-rounded, solution-centric result.



What You Need to Know About Co-Marketing

Launching a co-marketing campaign sounds easy enough. It might even sound like less work than other channel marketing efforts that put the burden of ideation and content development on your shoulders. But if you've ever been part of a group project at school, you know that more people doesn't always equal less work.

1. Choose the Right Format

Not every content format is right for every brand.

Your co-branded content should be built in a format that makes it easy for all partners to contribute to and use. Ebooks, white papers, webinars, videos, podcasts, blog posts, and infographics are all solid candidates for co-branding, but format selections should consider all of the following:

- Each partner's brand guidelines
- Budget (for both creation and distribution)
- Output capabilities of each partner

2. Start with a Co-Authored Outline

Before you dive into the creation of your partner marketing content, it's best to co-author an outline. An effective content outline isn't just a list of topics. It's a framework for your ideas that will ensure alignment on topics, prevent repetition or information gaps in your content, and identify which sections of your content will be customizable by partners.



Partner Marketing Checklist: Building Co-Branded Content

These questions can help start your co-marketing campaign off on the right foot.

- ✓ Do you know what message you're trying to convey to your readers?
- ✓ Are you all agreed on who you're trying to reach?
- ✓ Have you settled on a key takeaway? (This may take several iterations.)
- ✓ Have all partners contributed ideas they want to cover or key sections to explore?
- ✓ How long will each section be?
- ✓ Is all content in an order that will engage and educate readers?
- ✓ Has everyone reviewed and approved the first draft?

3. Make Personalization Possible

You've got your own style and vision for your marketing content, but it's important to leave room for content marketing partners to add their own touches to partner marketing assets.

You may want cornerstone content (like an ebook or report) to remain as-is but allow partners to customize related blog posts, infographics, or social media content to fit their unique voice.



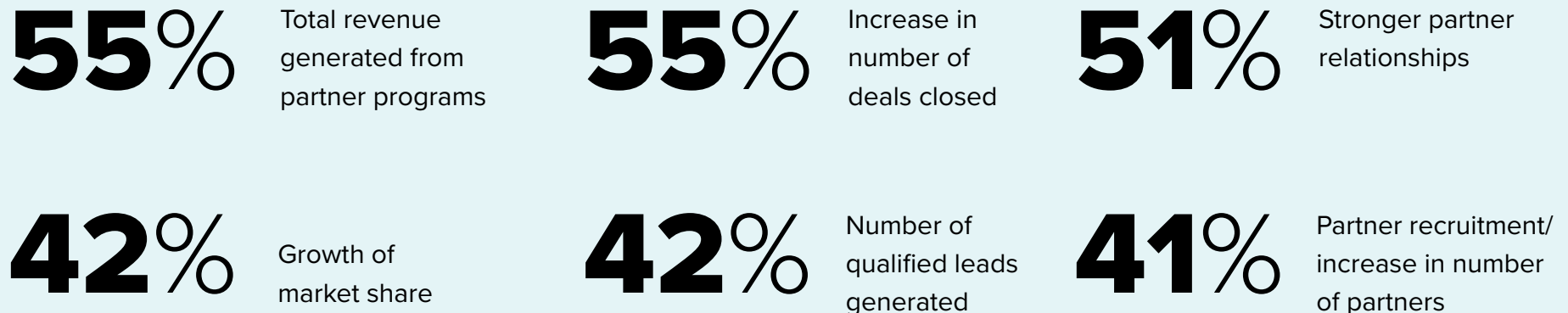
Check the ROI: Have Your Channel Marketing Efforts Paid Off?

Partner marketing should not be treated – or measured – in the same way as corporate marketing. (Unfortunately, we’ve seen too many vendors fail to recognize this and waste resources on partner marketing campaigns that miss the mark – if they even had a mark in the first place.)

Vendors and partners typically have siloed customer relationship management systems, making it hard to track the attribution of pipeline and sales back to partner marketing activities. This is a tricky problem to solve – but it’s not impossible.

Tracking the ROI of partner marketing programs isn’t easy.

How are Most Partner Marketers Measuring Success?



Customer engagement or conversion rates are the chief metrics for the success of regular marketing campaigns. These are obviously still important, but the ROI of partner marketing initiatives can also be measured in other ways.

1. Are Your Partners Engaged and Happy?

Measuring partner engagement is vital – a major indicator of a partner’s potential for success is how engaged they are with your organization. (And their success = your success.)

- How often do they log in to your partner portal?
- Do they download your marketing assets?
- What’s their level of participation in your marketing campaigns?
- Do they regularly participate in your partner marketing update calls?
- Do they use their allocated [marketing development funds](#)?
- Are they using your training resources or partner enablement tools?

Your partner marketing ROI will be minimal if partners aren’t engaged with the program – or if they’re dissatisfied with what you’re offering. Check engagement levels frequently and adapt your program until partners are happy.

2. Is Your Program Achieving Your Goals?

There are plenty of tools available to gather and parse information on program effectiveness. All you need to do is define some [key performance indicators](#) to quantify success.

- End-user and partner engagement
- Leads attributed by partner
- Partner’s influence on pipeline
- Average deal size per partner

Be sure each tactical element and distribution channel is effectively tagged to track the influence of each partner in the program. If the effectiveness of your channel program is low, it’s time to get some face time with your partners. Make sure everyone is aligned on goals, audience, key messages, customization, email and social optimization, and campaign timelines.

3. What Does Your Portal Data Show?

Your partner portal can provide incredible insights into the ROI of partner marketing programs and your channel partners’ success. It helps bridge the gap between vendors and partners and reduces the risk of introducing errors in data as you collect information from partners.

Some PRM systems have built-in APIs that allow limited data flow between vendor and partner CRM tools. Ask your IT team about API access and work with key partners to enable a seamless flow of data so you can share in the success of campaign pipeline generation and won leads.

Finding an Agency (There's No Shame in Asking for Help)

“Set it and forget it” is not an option in channel marketing. Sure, automation has made it easier than ever to launch email, social, or even [content](#) marketing campaigns. But partner marketing requires a little more attention, some specialized skills, and a hefty dose of diplomacy.

But not all [third-party marketing agencies](#) have [partner marketing experience](#). And engaging one that doesn't isn't really much better than trying to navigate the challenges of partner marketing yourself. Once you've determined you might need some help to get your channel program off the ground, how do you find an agency with the chops to make it happen?



Partner Marketing Checklist: Finding the Right Agency

You can't choose an agency until you understand what's holding your channel program back. Ask yourself these questions:

- Does your project need more resources?
- Are you able to measure the success of your program?
- Can you convey the combined value of you and your partners?
- Are you diplomatic enough to get all partners on-side?

Now take a deep breath. With a clearer idea of what you need, you can find the right agency to help you achieve your goals.

Lack of Resources Holding You Back?

Many partner marketers report their companies [invest less](#) in channel programs than in customer-facing campaigns, meaning they lack the resources needed to provide the support partners need. Smaller partners often lack the resources to contribute and lean on vendors for strategy and execution. Identify what you need and find an agency that can fill that gap.

Missing A Way to Measure Success?

One of the biggest frustrations voiced by channel players is [partnerships by handshake only](#), with no formal strategy for measuring success.

Progress toward many targets of a partner marketing campaign can be measured using the same tools you'd use on any other initiative – but tracking metrics across multiple partners and their specific systems can be challenging. A partner marketing agency with experience measuring the ROI of partner campaigns can help you track (and understand) your metrics – and adapt your efforts as needed.



Struggling to Showcase the Combined Value of Your Brands?

Creating an effective co-branded or channel campaign isn't just about finding partners whose audience you want to access. You must select the correct format, collaborate with partners on campaign strategies and goals – which will often conflict – and understand how your offering complements the products and services your partner provides (and vice versa).

To put it another way: the benefits of marketing are multiplied on a partner campaign. But so are the challenges. An experienced partner marketing agency can dig deep into the value proposition and market position of each partner involved in your campaign, get to know how it all meshes together and craft a message that conveys that synergy.

Partners Starting to Get on Your Nerves?

A lack of focus or alignment between partners generally means communication isn't at its best. Maybe partner organizations have wildly differing goals or expectations – or perhaps there is overlap in their offerings (and they are collaborating while competing).

The right agency can be the diplomatic power in your partnership, helping to find a way forward when communications have broken down. A team with experience in this type of campaign will have the chutzpah to make tough decisions with an unbiased perspective – because their sole focus is delivering high-quality content for a compelling campaign.

So there you have it. Everything you need to know to make channel partner marketing programs deliver the way they should. You've taken the first step toward leveraging your channel relationships to drive revenue, sales, and growth. Now it's time to keep that momentum going.





TPM: Your Partner Marketing Agency

TPM is a full-service marketing agency with years of experience helping tech businesses of all sizes design, build, and execute partner marketing campaigns. We're here to support your partner enablement, channel partner, and co-branding efforts with everything from strategy to design, from implementation to analytics.

Get the results you know channel marketing can deliver.

