

How to Create a Channel Partner Marketing Program: 7 Steps to Increase Pipeline



Successful channel marketing doesn't just happen. It takes planning, resources and a sustained effort. Channel marketing is more complex than other marketing efforts because you must simultaneously market to your partners — often through multiple layers of distribution — and through your partners to end customers.

The good news? The rewards for your redoubled efforts are much greater since channel partners that are successfully activated become force multipliers that can bring in new customers.

Getting Started on Your Channel Partner Marketing Plan

The first steps toward a successful channel marketing program begin well before the marketing starts, with foundational channel program investments. The two biggies:

C-Suite Commitment: We've said it before, and we're saying it here again — there is no better way to build lucrative, long-term relationships with channel partners than to help them grow their businesses. Taking the time to spell out the virtues of partner enablement to get C-Suite buy-in upfront can help you secure the commitment and resources you need to develop channel enablement best practices.

Rock-Solid Onboarding: The best partner marketing plan in the world won't matter if the rest of your channel partner onboarding program fails to deliver — particularly since partners' first impressions influence your potential for repeat business. initial wins.

7 Steps to Build Your Channel Partner Marketing Program

To help you build (or update) your channel marketing program, we returned to our all-star panel of channel marketing gurus to identify seven key steps you can take to set yourself up for success. Collectively, our panelists are responsible for billions of dollars in channel partner revenue development. They didn't disappoint, delivering candid, actionable advice you can put to work right away.

1 Lead Channel Marketing Programs with Purpose

Channel partners aren't just independent salespeople. They're businesses in their own right, with their own objectives and challenges. If your targeting is on-point, you're recruiting and working with partners that solve problems or create efficiencies for end customers that can benefit from your solutions. Your approach to those partners needs to be driven with the same attention to purpose that underpins your core value proposition for end customers.

2 Map Your Channel Marketing Communications

In the same way that direct marketing targets various buyer personas, channel marketing must target a range of decision-makers, too. The difference is that these decision-makers may be part of one or more organizations that make up your distribution channel. Mapping them is essential for effective communications. Be sure to identify your to-channel marketing points, through-channel marketing points, partner types, organizational roles and specialization (e.g., specific industry focus, specific target-size focus, etc.).

3 Allocate Your Channel Marketing Spend

In marketing, the term "different strokes for different folks" comes into play everywhere — even when it comes to budgeting. Prioritization can vary dramatically from company to company. Ultimately, though,

the takeaway we learned from the experts we interviewed dovetails nicely with our own long experiences in partner enablement: There's no single "right way" to budget and prioritize channel program spend, and it likely will change over time. The key is to incentivize the outcomes you want and then market and enable those outcomes effectively.

4 Develop Your Channel Marketing Assets

As we noted earlier, nothing impacts your campaigns more than effective content. Successful ads have great content. Videos that convert have solid scripts. Landing page conversions?

A channel partner, for all practical purposes, is a power customer that brings you revenue. You can create considerable value and consistency by formally establishing why you're doing business in the channel, the problems you aim to solve and opportunities you aim to create for your partners, just as you do for your end customers.

Khali Henderson
Senior Partner for Channel Marketing • BuzzTheory

Yeah . . . it's still all about the content. Whatever content you create has to move the needle. That means your content team needs to understand your technology, channels, verticals, to-channel and through-channel marketing, and how to effectively (and affordably) franchise content throughout that ecosystem. Even when you have top-tier content teams at your disposal, strategic alignment with partner and buyer journeys is vital. You need to deliver the right asset at the right time and circumstance.

5 Deploy Your Channel Marketing Assets (and Keep it Simple)

At deployment time, channel program management software can be your best friend. It's also essential to make it simple for partners to work with you. One of our panelists put it this way: "What doesn't work well is putting stuff in [your library] and telling Mr. and Mrs. Partner that it's 'in here' and 'go get it.' You have got to make it easy for the partner, handhold them through that process, talk to them about how other partners use that process and make it successful."

6 Test, Refine, Repeat Your Channel Marketing Programs

Measurement and refinement of your programs are essential to maximizing ROI. Your potential measurement attributes could include: Partner ecosystem coverage; partner activity and participation in key programs; marketing-qualified leads (MQLs); sales-qualified leads (SQLs); opportunities; pipeline stages; certifications; and customer and partner satisfaction metrics. One panelist, in particular, noted the importance of taking data snapshots on a regular basis to measure the growth in each area. In addition to your quantitative evaluations, solicit qualitative partner feedback (which can give you assessments that can help you refine your materials or help you identify assets that deliver better than their stats might naturally reveal).

7 Don't Be Afraid to Experiment with Channel Marketing

A common theme in our discussions was the need for creativity, innovation and experimentation. Trying new things — and being prepared to pivot toward those that deliver better outcomes — is critical. One of our panelists likens it to playing 3D chess: "You have to love the complexity of the channel. Every decision has layers and layers."

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