

How to Create a Repeatable Partner Enablement Framework to Grow Your Partners and Your Channel

In any service or support business, there's one key question that investors ask that separates the wheat from the chaff: "Does it scale?"

The same principle holds true in partner enablement. Simply put, scalability is vital to partner enablement — which itself is the most critical component in the long-term success of any channel program. To scale that part of your business well, you need a framework that drives repeatable, reliable results.

Why is Channel Partner Enablement So Important?

Successfully enabling your channel partners delivers numerous benefits in all the areas that matter to the C-suite. From a pure business development perspective, it can help drive shorter sales cycles, higher conversion rates and better quota attainment. From a strategic planning viewpoint, as your business development metrics improve, so too can the accuracy of your channel revenue and partner performance forecasts. Then there are opportunities to scale within your partner organizations and sustain your long-term success through lower attrition.

10 Steps to Build Your Partner Enablement Framework

Partner enablement is a big undertaking, but it doesn't have to be painful. We've broken the process down for you in 10 simple steps that can help you achieve success, and we asked a panel of industry experts for advice along the way.

1 Arm Your Company Before Arming Your Partners

A little prep goes a long way. When establishing or evolving your channel program, it's essential not only to work through how to recruit channel partners but also to enable them. You'll especially want to think through platforms, including learning management systems (LMS). You may find it advantageous to give your partners access to your LMS for technical and sales training and to your knowledge base for technical support, account information and quoting tools.

2 Plan in Advance for a Simplified Partner Enablement Experience

Your partners saddle up with you to solve their customer problems and grow revenues, not to decode how to work with your company or use its systems. Like all of us, they suffer easily from app fatigue. Make their experience painless and positive. Show them the value your training can bring them, while highlighting how little time and effort it'll take them to use it.

3 Nail Down Your Other Partner Onboarding Practices

Partner onboarding and enablement are intertwined in a yin-yang symmetry. Partner enablement is essential to channel partner onboarding, but onboarding is also a crucial part of enablement. Getting the rest of your onboarding processes down pat will set up partners for success through the rest of the process and build trust at that crucial time when your partner is forming opinions about working with you.

4 Establish Your Training Plan

Be ready to resume in-person training in a post-pandemic era. Video calls can't fully replace the impact of face-to-face meetings. Successful channel leaders embrace partner visits and even attend industry events with partners to demonstrate their commitment.

5 Build Your Incentive Plan

Once you've got your partners through the door, you'll need to give them a reason to stay engaged with you. Your most potent competitors develop reward systems that incent their partners to send revenue their way. You'll need plans of your own in order to compete in today's channel.

"Make it easy, make it quick . . . give partners tools they can learn, use, and measure easily and quickly. Partners are busy selling and implementing products; show them the value the training, tool, or program will bring them and how little time and effort it will take them to complete and use it, and you'll see your engagement soar."

MeiLee Langley

Senior Director, Channel & Field Marketing ■ Nextiva

6 Develop and Deploy Collateral

Most channel partners have stronger sales than marketing skills. Providing materials they can use to present a more professional image can help them close business. And you'll make your brand manager happy in the process because you'll ensure that representations of your company are complying with brand guidelines.

7 Establish Your Communications Routines

Nothing is static in 2021. You'll need to communicate with your distributors and partners for product updates, training opportunities, partner events, contests, SPIFFs, promotions, commission distributions and much more. Much of that information also has to be communicated internally.

8 Align and Set Your Goals

The need for alignment between your firm and your channel partners' needs isn't new, but how your firm can help your partners achieve their goals has changed since the pandemic—particularly in areas of digital transformation. It's accelerated, and alignment moving forward will need to be calibrated accordingly.

9 Be Responsive

Getting feedback from your partners can keep you on your game and ahead of your competition. Solicit feedback regularly and empower your channel team to escalate channel enablement requests. Make closing support available when it's needed.

10 Assess and Adapt

Modern channel enablement platforms make it easier than ever to assess the efficacy of your channel programs and the performance of your partners. You can use them to deploy live surveys, identify partners that may have been poached or showing signs of inactivity, and develop dashboards that you and your partners can use to maximize the effectiveness of your partnership.

So there you have it. These are our tips for creating a repeatable partner enablement framework that can help grow your partners and your channel. Happy blueprinting and building!

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