



# Designing successful partner led marketing campaigns

Partner led marketing programs offer vendors a virtual extension of internal sales & marketing resources to drive pipeline, but many fail to deliver a worthwhile ROI

## ■ THE PARTNER MARKETING DILEMMA

Partner led marketing programs are high on the agenda for many vendors operating in the IT channel. More often than not partner led initiatives fail to gain sufficient adoption and those which do get underway end their days with a practically unobtainable return on investment (ROI).

Many vendors adopt a 'build a marketing program, and they will come' approach consisting of overly complex campaigns with little attention given to individual partners' capabilities for delivery. This approach generally results in the vendor's vision of increased pipeline with a clear ROI remaining a field of dreams. Alternatively, vendors often hand program definition to the partner resulting in loss of control over brand and messaging consistency, and again little ROI from marketing development fund investments (MDF).

In this brief, we will highlight several pitfalls open to vendors attempting to establish partner led programs in the IT channel with suggested best practices for deploying campaigns that will engage partners, build pipeline and provide vastly improved ROI and reporting.

## ■ KNOW YOUR PARTNERS

Vendors working through the IT channel will have access to a wide range of partners ranging from multinational DMRs operating across multiple sectors to small regional resellers focusing on specific vertical markets.

The key here is that clearly one size does not fit all when it comes to developing partner led programs. Partner marketing capabilities will vary widely, ranging from large corporate resellers who may have a sizeable marketing team keen to charge vendors for a slice of their own menu of marketing options, down to regional partners with no internal marketing resources.

It is also important to keep in mind evidence from recent studies which highlight that many IT marketing professionals have no formal marketing education and specifically in the area of digital marketing; for instance 85% claim to have acquired their

## Summary

### 📦 The Objective:

Partner led marketing programs offer vendors a virtual extension of internal sales and marketing resources to drive pipeline

### 📍 The Challenge:

Many programs fail to deliver a worthwhile ROI due to overly complex campaigns that are beyond the delivery capabilities of the partner

### 🔗 The Solution:

To ensure success vendors must gather more partner intelligence and provide training with incentives to reward engagement and campaign reporting



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knowledge only through on-the-job experience<sup>[1]</sup>. Add to this the fact that partner marketing teams are being bombarded with marketing programs from multiple vendors, then the following principles should be adhered to when developing any partner led campaign: Keep it simple, educate the partner on how to deliver the program and hand-hold them along the way.

Vendors should gather more data about their partners preferably at the on-boarding stage; the following guidelines should be applied to determine partner capabilities in order to help you equip them to deliver your partner led programs:

- **Gather specific partner data:** Sales and marketing team headcounts, markets served, the vendor line card, level of revenue achieved within your market sector.
- **Identify and establish peer-to-peer executive alignments:** Search for barriers which could prohibit a successful partnership such as incumbent competitors and incentive schemes which exclusively favour other vendors. Identify internal product champions.
- **Determine partner marketing team capabilities:** Train partners specifically on how to deliver your marketing program. Many vendors offer sales and technical training with certification but few provide equally important marketing certification. Install incentive schemes that will reward partners for completing your marketing training and for ongoing ROI reporting.
- **Look for synergies with other vendors:** A partner may have achieved great success with another vendor so explore collaborative programs. Many partners will be looking to offer a complete solution to their buyers rather than a point product

## ■ MDF & ROI - ALWAYS STAY IN CONTROL

Marketing development fund programs are common practice whereby a percentage of revenue received by the vendor is set aside and offered back to the channel partner. The typical process involves the partner making a funding proposal for a campaign idea of their own. The vendor determines whether the partner qualifies and if approved attempts to develop content for the partner to use within their campaign. It is at this point forward that most MDF campaigns start to fail. The partner does not really know how to use the content provided by the vendor, no clear ROI goals are established or agreed, and no facilities for regular meaningful reporting are set in place.

Without structured vendor support the partner may attempt to use the content supplied by the vendor

or perhaps develop content of their own, resulting in inconsistent messaging; either way little or no ROI is delivered at the end of the campaign. This common theme highlights the importance for the vendor to stay in control and offer the partner a selection of different marketing plays funded through MDF with vendor training and on-going support as the partner conducts the campaign.

The following guidelines should be applied to ensure success when managing MDF based programs:

- **Stay in control:** It is far better for the vendor to offer a range of marketing plays to ensure messaging consistency and to price these within their MDF program framework.
- **Keep it simple:** Many vendors have overly complex MDF approval processes which can cause partners to turn away from MDF and develop their own campaigns and messaging, or even worse push them to focus on another vendor.
- **Stand firm on ROI:** There will be times when MDF needs to be used for partner in-house events such as annual partner conferences or vendor days. Always ensure ROI is established and agreed regardless of the campaign source.
- **Do not base success on historical performance:** When determining ROI many vendors will look to in-house or a partner's historical performance with similar marketing plays. Always seek current benchmark data as historical performance is not necessarily good performance.
- **Benchmark regionally:** Within EMEA local regulations may affect campaign performance, for example, data protection laws are more stringent in Germany than in the UK, so 500 scanned visitor badges from a trade show in Germany may not yield the same level of detailed contact information as would be expected from a similar UK event.

## ■ PRINCIPLES FOR SUCCESSFUL CLOSED-LOOP PARTNER LED PROGRAMS

We have highlighted the importance of gathering partner intelligence; a key component of that activity should also include an investigation into the most appropriate campaigns applicable to each partner. A DMR with a sizeable in-house telemarketing team may favour a call-out campaign with detailed call scripts and a specific calls to action, whereas a smaller partner may favour inbound campaigns using syndicated thought leadership content such as white papers and case studies. Regardless of the format an area often overlooked by vendors is performing



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an analysis of the partner's customer buyer personas. It should not be assumed that the partner's customers fit the same personas expected by the vendor, value added resellers (VARs) will often be adding services and technologies to create a turnkey solution, so the vendor needs to determine which of their unique selling points compliment the positioning required for a VARs target audience.

In addition to analysing buyer personas, it is also important to consider the point in the sales cycle that the partner is likely to be engaging with the customer. With so much inbound content available to today's buyers the challenge for the vendor is to create campaign messaging that serves to reset a customer's thinking using data points which highlight the business value consequences of following any competitive solutions they may be favouring.

The holy grail for any partner led campaign is to capture accurate and timely ROI data so the each MDF £/€ spent can be linked to a £/€ contribution to pipeline. Of course each type of marketing play will exhibit a different spend/pipeline contribution ratio, so again regional country specific peer benchmarking data will help to determine the ROI levels that should be aimed for. Partner ROI reporting is the most problematic area of partner led campaign management, so it is here that vendors should place significant attention. Partners will invariably need prompting, coaching and assistance to gather and report on ROI data. To facilitate and drive partner engagement vendors should aim to keep campaign resources and ROI reporting mechanisms together in one easy to find location, preferably on the vendor's partner portal and ultimately linked directly into the vendors CRM system.

Clear and concise marketing training should be provided to the partner with certification and reward based incentives given upon completion of training and at checkpoints throughout the campaign to reward regular ROI reporting. Vendors should start small and aim to pilot their campaigns with a limited number of strategic partners. To automate this entire process, vendors should look towards implementing a through-partner marketing automation platform to further simplify and coordinate multiple marketing activities across various partner channels.

## ■ THE PLEXUS WAY

With a plethora of specifications, opinions and reviews at their fingertips, customers now have more informed choices and buyer power than ever before. However, with all this information on hand they face the task of making a decision that's right for them.

Channel partners now play a concierge role, identifying solutions that match their customers' needs and guiding their choices. Any partner led marketing activities delivered by vendors should support this role. This means offering content that promotes thought leadership, running on a platform which makes it as simple as possible to effectively conduct a campaign.

This allows vendors to close the gaps left in channel marketing with a set of campaigns that partners can customize and syndicate to specific audiences. The key to successful partner led campaigns will be simplicity, consistency, partner enablement and vendor assisted closed-loop reporting.

Of course a full partner management program requires many skills and resources, The Plexus Way virtual marketing team solution can either deliver a complete partner marketing solution for you, or fill any of the skills gaps you may have.

“Plexus really understand the IT Partner Channel, so they were able to advise and expertly manage our channel campaigns with minimal intervention”

*Joerg Vogel, Partner Sales Manager,  
Cristie Data GmbH.*

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[1] Adobe. (Anon.), Digital Distress: What Keeps Marketers Up at Night?, <http://www.images.adobe.com/www.adobe.com/content/dam/Adobe/en/solutions/digital-marketing/pdfs/adobe-digital-distress-survey.pdf> [accessed April 2015]