

# What's the biggest challenge facing Channel Managers?

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We recently conducted a survey on LinkedIn and asked over 190 Channel & Account Management Experts what was their greatest challenge. Mindshare was top of the list.

While product, price and profitability undoubtedly play an important part in the mindshare of your channel partners, there are other issues to consider. Trust, Ambition, Loyalty, Communication and Synergy (TALCS) are perhaps less obvious components of mindshare, yet equally powerful.

This guide is divided into 3 sections:

1. The top 10 challenges
2. Measuring mindshare
3. Increasing your share

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## 1. The top 10 challenges

While the top challenge for Channel Managers appears to be mindshare its worthwhile viewing the full list:

1. Mindshare
2. Communication
3. Margin
4. Commitment
5. Conflict
6. Trust
7. Alignment
8. Engagement
9. Focus
10. Loyalty

Communication came a close second, and its interesting that commitment, loyalty and trust can all be enhanced by better communication. It even plays a part in improving mindshare.

But before you can improve mindshare, you need to quantify your current position. How much of your channel partners mind do you own?




Channel Managers on LinkedIn were asked to describe in one word their biggest challenge. Over 190 responded and the above word-cloud shows the top 50 answers.

Source: SCi Sales Group, LinkedIn survey (2011). n=195

## 2. Measuring mindshare

As part of your channel partner satisfaction surveys you should include measurement of TALCS.

**Trust** – Do your partners trust you to deliver?
**Ambition** – Do your partners feel you share common goals?
**Loyalty** – Do they feel there is value in a long-term relationship?
**Communication** – Do you have frequent dialogue and use the right media?
**Synergy** – Do they feel both companies co-operate sufficiently?

Conducting this type of survey on the telephone can be more revealing than an online survey or questionnaire sent in the post. Interviewers can elicit more complete and substantive answers, as well as ask for clarification or elaboration concerning responses.

By asking partners to score your performance, perhaps 1 to 5, you will get a clear picture of where your mindshare is strong or weak. It may also be possible to ask partners to rate your performance against competitors. In addition, during the phone call notes can be made on why scores are high or low. This adds valuable qualitative data to the quantitative score.



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Share this with your Followers on Twitter:
“Mindshare is biggest challenge for Channel Managers. Next is Communication, Margin, Commitment & Loyalty. New research bit.ly/SCiMindshare”

## 3. Increasing your share

So now you've got your base score for each partner, how do you begin improving mindshare?

**Trust**
Trust is obviously a two-way street, but according to our research if Channel Managers want to be trusted they need to keep their promise, act with integrity and protect their reputation.

Keeping promises is not a simple case of "agree what you are going to do, and then do it". You need to "agree what you are going to do, do it, and then tell them you've done it". Good communication is a valuable part of trust.

Integrity builds trust. For example, a leading IT company ensures Sales Managers sign a code of conduct. This stipulates they should not show bias in favouring one channel partner. By contrast, frequently changing incentive programmes will promote distrust.

Reputation also impacts on trust. A product/service with a reputation for failure will damage trust in your ability to deliver something partners can sell.

**Ambition**

There needs to be harmony in the ambitions of your company and those of your partners. Do you share common goals? Are your territorial and market ambitions the same?

A partnership with shared ambitions is likely to have less conflict, and may lead to a deeper level of engagement.

**Loyalty**

Trust is a step beyond satisfaction, but a step short of loyalty. Loyalty is linked primarily to whether the partner feels there is value in the relationship. Incentive and reward programmes will certainly improve loyalty, and engaging them early in planning quotas will remove the feeling that goals are arbitrary.

But this is not simply about profit margins. Your partners will take a long-term view of the partnership and consider how much effort is needed to make it work, so make partnering an easy process with a clear path.



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"How to boost mindshare of Channel Partners; improve Trust, Ambition, Loyalty, Communication & Synergy (TALCS). Download bit.ly/SCiMindshare"

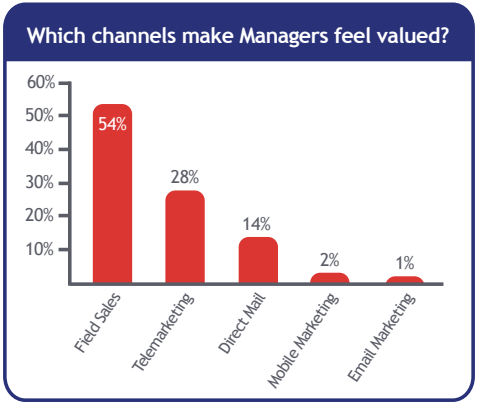
**Communication**

An important factor in gaining mindshare is communication. But its relevance, timing or openness often leaves partners confused and dissatisfied.

You should start by conducting an audit of your partner communications. Is it a genuine dialogue or a monologue? Is it relevant to individual partners or a 'one size fits all' blast? Do you have a partner portal? Is there an immediate response to partner enquiries and easy access to information?

Don't ignore the benefit of human interaction in the drive for mindshare. We asked managers which marketing channel made them feel most valued. To avoid prejudice in their choice we phrased the question in a non-marketing format.

The results show that a visit from a field sales executive or well managed telemarketing campaign are more likely to make channel partners feel valued.




We asked over 600 managers the following question:

**"It's your birthday. Five friends congratulate you using different methods. Which friend values you most?"**

The channels with Human Interaction performed best.

Source: SCi Sales Group, LinkedIn survey (2011). n=609

**Synergy**

Synergy is all about co-operation, and is obviously a key element in dictating the level of mindshare. Co-operating on large scale projects and co-operating in the marketing push helps build synergy.

The power of supplying leads as part of your co-op marketing should not be underestimated. According to ChannelWeb, 82% of respondents said they are motivated by an OEM/vendors ability to supply leads. But don't deliver cold leads; they need to be BANT* qualified.

Co-operating on large scale projects has a dual benefit; the partner will have you front-of-mind during the life of the project, and you may benefit from their input on specialist areas.



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Share this with your Followers on Twitter:
"82% of Channel Partners are motivated by OEM/vendors ability to supply BANT qualified leads. Improve partner mindshare bit.ly/SCiMindshare"

* BANT = Budget, Authority, Need and Timescale

> Over deliver, response time, two-way communication, etc. In summary, make it easy and enjoyable for them to deal with you. This isn't rocket science, it's just good customer service, and a Channel Partner is your customer.
>
> **Channel Manager, Bath, UK**

> Follow up on email (I usually try and do this immediately if possible, but rarely let emails go until the next day), call back, call when you say you are, provide information requested...and then... probably the largest contributor - listen.
>
> **Sales & Marketing Manager, California, USA.**

> Timely communication is a must in our business. I have found my best experiences are with managers who are more proactive than reactive to customer needs.
>
> **Telecommunications Manager, New York, USA**

## Conclusion

Mindshare is the biggest challenge for many Channel Managers. On the other side of the coin, the challenges for channel partners are margin, cashflow and (if you are an IT distributor) the cloud.

Beyond increasing their margins and giving them generous payment terms, you can increase channel partner mindshare by increasing **trust** and **loyalty**, improving **communication** and **synergy** as well as aligning your **ambitions**.

Communication came a close second on the list of challenges for Channel Managers, and good communication can help improve trust and loyalty as well as benefit mindshare as a whole. But it has to be the right type of communication.

Field sales and telemarketing are known to make channel partners feel more valued, and are perhaps the best marketing tools for keeping you front-of-mind.



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**SCi Sales Group Ltd**
7 Albion Court
Albion Place
London W6 0QT

**T:** 020 8846 3950
**E:** info@scisalesgroup.com
**W:** www.scisalesgroup.com

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Author: Graham Smith, Marketing Director, SCi Sales Group Ltd.
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