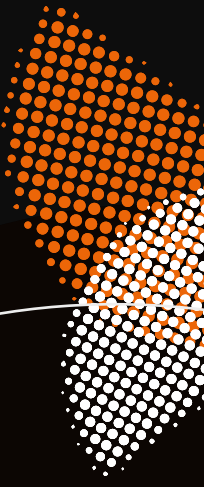
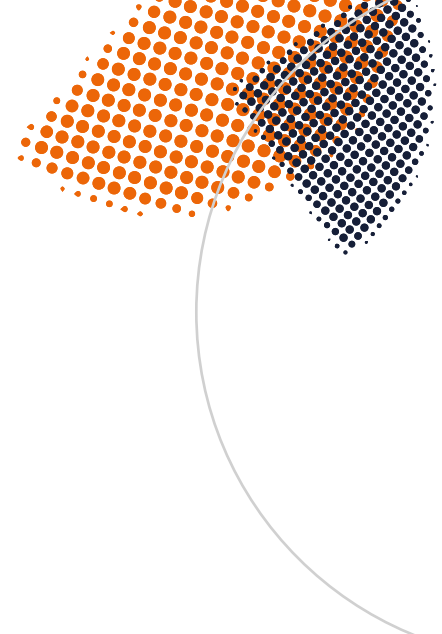


The tech marketer's guide to channel marketing



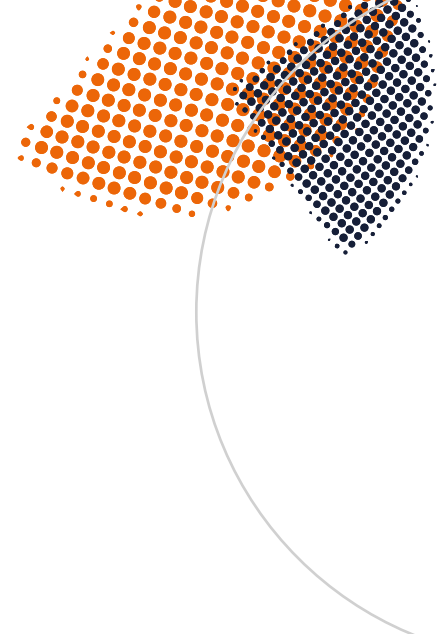
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Introduction

The channel has always been an important route to market in the tech sector, but it's under pressure like never before.

As the nature of technology products and services are delivered and sold changes, vendors have to cope with greater competition in a ruthless marketplace where what you can provide to partners is all important.

We've put together this guide to help you navigate this increasingly complex and competitive landscape, and position your brand as the ideal collaborator.

Read on to learn:

- › Why approaches to channel marketing are changing in the tech sector
- › The importance of working with channel partners in tech
- › An overview of the different type of channel partners to work with
- › The skills needed by modern channel marketers
- › How to find the right channel partner mix for your business
- › How to manage the tensions between internal direct sales and channel partners
- › The metrics to help deliver return from your channel partners
- › Award-winning case studies from tech firms including Microsoft, Lenovo and Promethean.

“If you want to understand the different aspects of B2B marketing, then take a look at channel marketing. It’s rewarding, interesting, challenging, and frustrating – channel partners can be like babies, they always need feeding – but you’ll enjoy it and find a new side of yourself. If you’re a B2B marketer and you’re bored, do channel marketing because it will stimulate your senses.”

Andy Grant, director, international channel marketing, Mitel



Tom Perry
CEO, Sherpa Marketing

Comment

Why channel transformation is the key

The tech channel and the relationships between vendors, distributors and partners is growing evermore complex, and it would appear channel marketing, which sits at the heart of this relationship, isn't keeping up with this complexity.

This guide aims to highlight some these complexities and how the channel needs to transform to thrive as go-to-market models and partners change rapidly.

First, the channel remains very product-orientated. Resellers still rely on traditional models of revenue generation, which are aligned to market development funds (MDF) to drive channel marketing. This hasn't changed in 25 years and is inherently flawed.

An extremely restrictive MDF environment, driven by accountants, is usually accompanied by a stringent list of required activities for funding to be provided. Coupled with an unnaturally strong focus on lead generation, and emphasis on quantity over quality, the channel marketing landscape is in need of a little TLC.

The current model is focused on the short-term and doesn't factor in that buying cycles that often last six-12 months and do not align to quarterly MDF cycles. It creates scenarios where the partner is reactive and sometimes trying to identify where to spend next quarter's MDF, or worse, MDF left over from the current quarter.

Over the past three years, we have seen a requirement to move to more strategic marketing. This requires a new mindset, mostly directed by the partner who brings a specific skillset. By adapting the longevity of campaigns to align to buying cycles and creating reporting visibility, partners and vendors will be able to take into account the complex buyer journey and track leads back to the quarter in which they originated in real time.

We believe a mix of solid, but defined regular planning, cutting edge marketing programmes such as ABM and up-to-date channel activation platforms are critical.

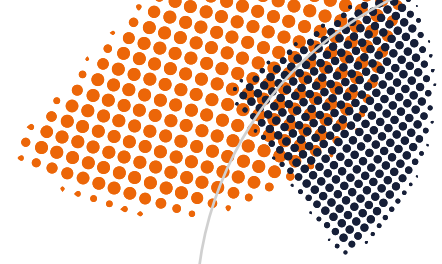
ABM is relatively uncharted in the channel but is ideal to create a longer-term, customer-centric, value driven approach. It is not easy and requires expert input and a broad skillset that some vendors don't even realise they need. You cannot simply lift a direct ABM programme, put it in the channel and expect it to work. Channel partners bring a different specialism to the table. Vendors bring the product, infrastructure and systems, and partners bring specialisms including verticals, horizontals, access to new markets, innovation, market penetration and consultancy.

You need a specific channel programme which is supported and affordable in field by partners, but leverages the proposition partners bring to solve additional challenges within the target audiences.

Working with an agency who specialises in channel marketing provides any struggling vendor with the expertise to put their product or service in front of key decision-makers at targeted accounts which are in-market. Among the standout benefits are:

- › Better processes and partner education lead to greater understanding of products and how to market them
- › Opening up marketing and sales processes gives all parties more visibility into the areas where sales enablement requires more focus
- › Improved partner engagement
- › Greater accountability of the partner when it comes to delivering results in return for vendor investment.

The time of fudging MDF is over. Channel transformation is the way forward.



Section 1

The changing channel in the tech sector

As B2B marketing has developed rapidly over the past decade, channel approaches have remained fairly traditional (some would say old-fashioned).

Partners are still rewarded and remunerated in conventional ways, often via blunt rebates. For many, the vendor's willingness to open its wallet is the biggest factor in how much support they'll get. Measurement and success can often remain opaque.

The lack of change perhaps is surprising given the rapid development in the way products and services are delivered has advanced in the tech sector during the same period – from physical hardware and products to hugely complex IT services provided over the internet.

This is changing – but slowly – as partners move away from a focus on margin and volume toward providing enhanced services and support. This too has an impact on the market as partners that previously never competed now offer similar propositions. And in some cases, the relationship appears closer to partner or co-marketing.

All this also means channel marketing is ripe for a shake-up, and for enterprising B2B marketers there are gains to be made through being bold and innovative.

— *“The channel model hasn't really changed for 25-30 years. It is a systemized model. Some bright spark in marketing years ago said I'll give you 3% of the spend you deal with me back and that model has not changed. That does not engender an environment of cutting edge marketing skill”*

Tom Perry, CEO, Sherpa Marketing

— *“Channel marketing has so much potential for innovation, and it surprises me it hasn't happened yet. Now is the channel's time. It's a very easy win if you get channel marketing right. If you do something innovative, you can make a really big win quickly.”*

Ginny Follen, marketing director EMEA, Veridium



Why is the channel important in the tech sector?

Channel has always been an important route to market in the tech sector and will continue to be so for the following reasons:

- › **It allows you to scale quickly.** For young tech businesses that want to grow quickly, channel partners are a great way to drive sales without having to build your own internal sales function.
- › **Partners can extend your reach into new markets.** Finding partners with expertise and connections in different regions can open up those geographies for your products or services without the expense and complexity of entering them yourself.
- › **The interconnected nature of the tech sector.** In a vertical where many products interact and integrate with each other or offer complementary services, collaboration between vendors is desirable for users to help them navigate their stack.

— *“We see a lot of early stage vendors, coming from the US with financial backing, think now is the time to get into Europe. 90% of the time, they’ll start with channel sales people. Recruit partners, enable them, get them clued up on the product. Channel marketing at that point is almost always outsourced to an agency. As the revenues grow within a market, they will bring a channel marketing resource in-house – but that can sometimes be two or three years after landing in the market.”*

Tom Perry, Sherpa Marketing

The different types of channel partners

Do you know your VAR from your ISV? Here’s a brief overview of the most common types of channel partners used in the tech sector.

› Reseller

Traditionally, resellers have simply taken products and sold them on, usually in exchange for a rebate from the vendor based on the volume sold. This role is changing, as many tech companies have moved away from physical products and hardware toward a SaaS model. Resellers are often accredited by vendors as official suppliers of their products or services.

Now, many resellers are becoming **value added resellers (VAR)**. These provide additional services, such as integration, maintenance or service support, in addition to the product sold.

› Managed service provider

This partner operates and maintains technology in exchange for a recurring fee. Services provided could include maintenance, help-desk, installation etc. They will provide both the technology and bundle that with the other services. The main difference between a VAR and an MSP is the length of the contract – VARs tend to be more transactional, one-off purchases; whereas MSPs tend to be to long-term service agreements.

› Systems integrator

Systems integrators often provide a more consultative services to buyers than managed service providers, advising which technology an organization should implement and then supporting them through that process. These can range from small, boutique agencies to huge multinational consultancies.

› Distributor

Distributors are the link in the chain between the vendor and other channel partners. Given the scale of their networks, they are often the quickest route to growth in a partner program. Sometimes they offer other services including training, licensing or even financing.

› Independent software vendor (ISV)

As suggested by the name, ISVs are companies that develop and sell software. Their position in the channel is that often the large platform providers such as Apple, Microsoft or Salesforce will partner with these vendors to develop applications for their platforms to enhance their attractiveness in the marketplace.

› Alliance partners

These are non-competitive vendors who have complementary products and services. You might choose to go to market jointly with them to leverage scale or take advantage of up-sell and cross-sell opportunities in new markets. These may also be ISVs themselves.

Even within this broad overview, there is a whole host of different hierarchies and cross-over between these partners. A small reseller turning over \$1 million a year is going to need a lot more support and direction than a multi-million dollar revenue Silicon Valley giant – but the big fish might not consider you to be its top partner.

— *“As solutions the vendors provide get more complex, you need a mix of partners. What’s happening is channels work with other channels to solve a problem for a customer. Traditional resellers were very good at selling one product or service. That world has moved on, there’s no-one just selling one end-to-end solution anymore. The make-up of the channel is changing a lot. There is a composite, so a vendor is looking at the channel saying have I got the partner ecosystem to deliver and keep my core products growing.”*

Tom Perry, Sherpa Marketing

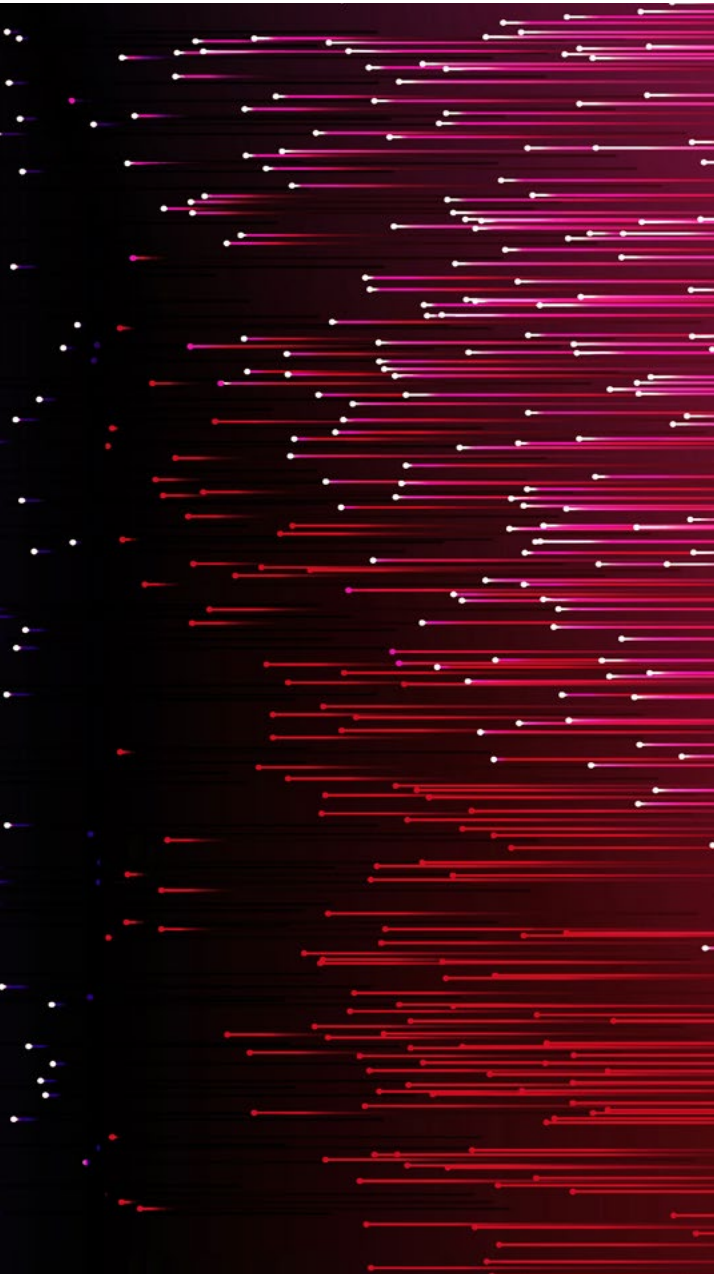
What skills make a great channel marketing?

Channel marketers, of course, need all the skills you’d find in a general B2B marketer, but there will be certain parts of the role that will need specialist talents.

- › **Personal, and be able to work at all levels of an organization.** You’ll be selling your plans into CEOs, sales directors and marketing directors one day, then talking to and training field sales teams the next. This means you need to be able to explain your strategy simply and succinctly so everyone will understand what you want to achieve.
- › **Great multitasker.** With so many relationships to manage, meetings to attend and campaigns on the go, channel marketing is a real juggling act, so you also need to be flexible and adaptable.
- › **Bold and brave.** How are you going to make sure your brand is top of mind among partners? You need to stand out in their mind, and personality is a big factor.

“The joy you get when partners bring in deals – be they £15,000 or £1.5 million – from campaigns or activity you’ve done never goes away and is a buzz.”

Andy Grant, Mitel



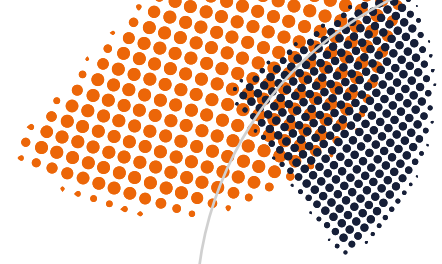
— *“To look different from our rivals, we made it look slick and innovative, almost like you were marketing B2C. We needed to change what we were doing to stand out, because we didn’t have the budget to take partners to Vegas every week, like some.”*

Ginny Follen, Veridium

- › **Master motivator.** You have to either be very extroverted, or at least be able to turn on that side of your personality if you’re running a sales call out day (where you work with a partner to motivate their team) for instance.
- › **Tenacious, resilient, and thick skinned.** You’ll be trying to force open a lot of closed doors, either with potential partners or internally with stakeholders.
- › **Strong salesperson.** You’ll be selling your strategy internally, selling your vendor to your partners and training and motivating sales teams at the partners.
- › **Commercially aware.** You’ll need to be able to understand the commercial objectives in the business, how partners can meet those – and work out what mix of partners will provide the optimum return.

— *“The perfect channel marketer is almost a hybrid role of campaign marketer and business developer. You have to really think about things from a campaign perspective and the ability to execute is crucial. It’s not enough anymore to create a load of market development funds (MDFs). There’s now a lot more accountability than there was 10 years ago. Your ability to track investment and what you can turn that into has to be really clear.”*

David Burnand, senior director, EMEA marketing, Box



Award-winning case study

How Microsoft drove more than \$100m in pipeline through its channel partners

Microsoft Surface is critical to CEO Satya Nadella's vision of 'One Microsoft'. It is the gateway to the Microsoft ecosystem and the best way to experience Microsoft's productivity suite, Windows 10 and Office 365.

It has ambitious targets to win market share in the commercial space from key competitors like Google and Apple, who are entrenched in certain industries – such as education and creative.

It became apparent that many channel partners were used to selling Office, Dynamics, Windows, or other Microsoft products but were unfamiliar with Surface. It was a different type of product – hardware, not software.

Partners needed:

- › Compelling guidance on how and why to sell a premium hardware proposition
- › Industry sub-sector messaging (e.g. legal or accounting, within professional services)
- › Greater coordination with partner managers at Microsoft
- › Efficient opportunity routing, so leads were directed to the right partners, without duplication or channel conflict.

The Surface team needed to integrate with partners, as they would be picking up the responsibility of the sale – so a key element had to be motivating and enabling partners to do that.

The key target industries were education, manufacturing, and professional and financial services. Within these, Microsoft targeted sub-sectors such as engineering, legal, and management consultancy. Seventeen countries were included across North America, Australasia and Western Europe.

The Marketing Practice created assets that shared Microsoft's expertise, so partners could sell to SMBs more effectively using relevant language and examples. These included:

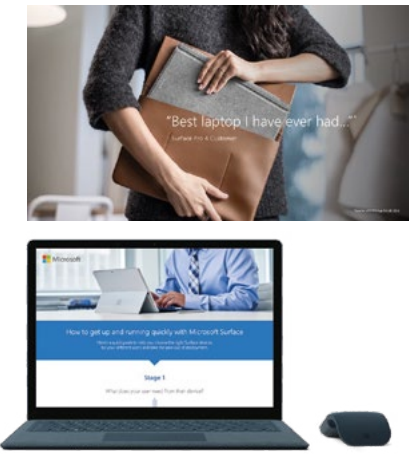
- › Premium device guides styled as fashion magazines
- › Industry-specific messaging
- › Pitch presentations
- › Interactive product guides
- › Industry buzzword glossaries.

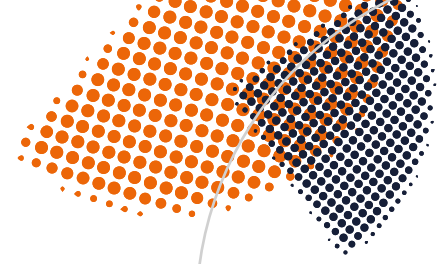
These assets were hosted on a digital hub that consolidated a previous sprawl of domains that existed at Microsoft. A single platform for partners to access the content they needed. The program operated on a hub and spoke model, with a central team based in Seattle and local teams in each region. Local teams helped feed market insights back to Microsoft HQ. Each region had telemarketers and a bespoke dataset. The agents were briefed to act more consultatively with the target organizations than a traditional calling approach. They researched the company's IT estate, device usage, and worker profiles. Call guides used the information that had been built into each market to help the team to nuance the approach and use the relevant content. Agents were responsible for nurturing the sales opportunity until it was ready for the partner sales team – whether that lasted days, months, or the entire year.

Each region had a dedicated head who handed off sales opportunities in person and nurtured relationships with partners. Partners had to commit to SLAs and only those with aligned strategy were included.

Microsoft knew that small businesses like to try before they buy. Rather than bother the partners with these small deals (which would put them off engaging and make it feel like a waste of their time), Microsoft developed a trial process to nurture the opportunity, get decision-makers to experience the devices first-hand, then stay within the marketing process with relevant communications until they were ready to talk to the partner about the bigger deal.

Globally, the program generated 658 opportunities, which included a total of 42,525 separate devices. This has generated more than \$5.45m of confirmed closed revenue. The value of these opportunities was over \$103.6m in sales pipeline. Alongside the commercial success, the program has been instrumental in improving Microsoft's relationship with partners. The most popular piece of partner content was downloaded over 14,000 times (and was the seventh most downloaded asset globally of 2017).





Section 2

How to find the right channel partners

Finding the right channel partner mix

There's no fixed rule on the number of partners you should have. It will be entirely dependent on the strategy for your channel partner program, and what you want it to achieve.

What you need to find is the right mix of partners. The simplest way to approach this would be to use the 80:20 rule – where 80% of your sales or revenue comes from 20% of the partners or people. Focusing your resources, support and incentives on vendors that will generate the majority of your sales will be crucial to your success in the channel.

“You need to rely on the partners that specialize in you. A partner could have 6, 12 or 20 vendors they work with. You want to be the number one in line. Having 10,000 partners doesn't mean you'll make your number. Having 1000 partners who are focused on you, where you are the number one or two vendors in your sector will give you greater success and revenue.”

Andy Grant, Mitel



Avoid this mistake

Too often, marketing starts off with its channel strategy in a different direction to the business, says Andy Grant. You must be aligned with the leadership team. You need to understand what they want, what the business is driving, and then build that into your marketing strategy to deliver that through your partners.

How to identify the right channel partners for your program

There will be a number of criteria for choosing a partner, but as mentioned, the reference point should be the objective for your partner program. That might be growing scale, extending reach or even growing brand awareness.

— *“It comes down to what do you want to achieve versus what are you prepared to give. What you want to achieve could be any number of things. At Box, we use it to extend our reach in territories, and with some of our tech partnerships, it’s as much about awareness as it is sales.”*

David Burnand, Box

You should be aware that with any partner selection will come an element of compromise. For instance, if you want to work with a partner to extend your reach into new markets, that might mean accepting it may not be possible to provide the perfect B2B brand experience you do through direct sales at home.

Many tech businesses provide a tiered accreditation program for their partners. This allows partners to be recognized for their expertise and often gives them access to greater levels of marketing support. At Mitel for example, it provides joint marketing funds to its platinum and gold partners. There is an agreement from the partner they will commit to maintain their certification, and both parties will go to market together.

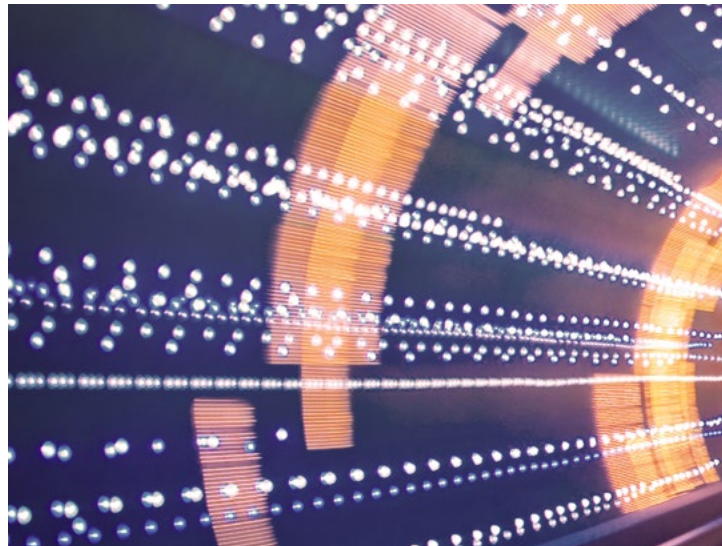
— *“My top tip would be have clarity on your objectives. You can chase a lot of rainbows in channel marketing and not get very much from them. Pursue them with real focus, and don’t get blown off course. Potential partners for Box are almost limitless, but even if you narrow it down there could be 50 hugely credible partners, from co-vendors through to boutique integrators. You have to place your bets carefully, or you’ll try and do everything and do it badly.”*

David Burnand, Box

The other key factor in onboarding the right partners is will you have the internal resources necessary to serve them? It’s pointless to decide to work with multiple partners of various sizes if you don’t have the capability to provide the training, support and resources required to serve them in market. This also applies to doing your due diligence on your partners. Do they have the capability to achieve your objectives? How much common ground is there between you?

— *“You need a lot of resources to support partners. The more you have, the more people you need to do channel enablement – to go out there and do ‘lunch and learns’, to manage the deal registration desk, and to train the partners to provide those services.”*

Ginny Follen, Veridium





Managing your channel program internally

Getting a channel marketing program off the ground internally can be tough. Not least because of the inherent tension when you have an external partner trying to drive sales at the same time as your internal direct sales team.

As with any marketing project, the buy-in of senior leadership is essential before you start. This is particularly important here, as interaction between your own c-suite and the channel partner's can go a long way to securing that all important primacy in the partner's line-up. A c-suite that works together will also make it easier to determine whether the partner is the right fit to achieve your objectives.

The advice from our contributors is to make sure you sell the channel marketing program internally – especially with sales – to try to avoid disputes later on. Tom at Sherpa suggests making the demarcation between the direct team and the channel clear upfront. In most tech businesses, direct sales go after the big ticket items, with channel responsible for the long tail. It doesn't have to be size either; sometimes, the responsibility could be divided by vertical, but the key is to avoid any potential duplication.

— *“Marketing departments sometimes forget they need to service internally as well as externally. Always remember to get the sales team on-board before you take your strategy to market. If you go off half-cocked and don't tell them, you'll get their backs up and it won't be as successful as it could be.”*

Andy Grant, Mitel

How can you position yourself as number one among channel partners?

The verdict from the experts was pretty unanimous – channel partners value the bottom line above all.

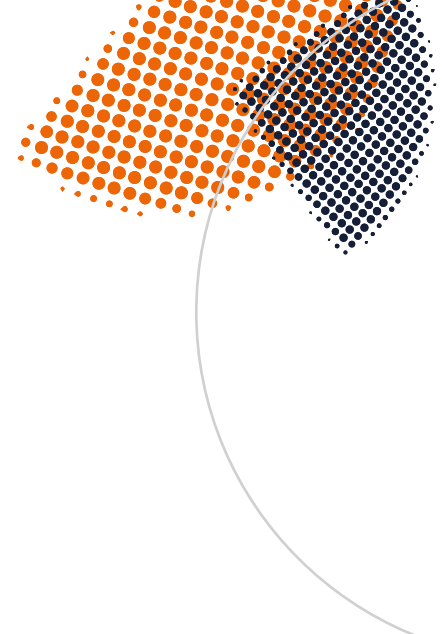
To begin with, you may even need to hand leads over to your partners – yes, you may need to give them leads to get leads back!

You may think your product is the bees knees, but your partner may have anywhere from 20 to 220 vendors who think the same. Channel partners need to make money. Offering to work on existing lead opportunities together and sharing the success will engender trust for the future and improve your standing.

— *“The more you scratch their back, the more they'll scratch yours. You absolutely cannot just hand it over to channel partners. It's linking up between businesses for mutual reward. If you sit back and wait for the channel leads to come in, they never will.”*

Ginny Follen, Veridium

Above all, your channel marketing strategy needs to be simple enough to explain and easy for everyone in the field to understand; that establishes what you want partners to do for you as a vendor. They're an extension not only of your workforce, but your brand, awareness, capability to create opportunities and ability to serve customers.



Award-winning case study

How Promethean's channel marketing program caught fire

Promethean is a manufacturer of interactive education technology such as ActivPanel which is a range of touch-enabled flat panels. Its channel partners are the lifeblood of its business. The brand doesn't sell directly to schools, instead it relies on a network of carefully selected and trusted partners to resell their products directly to the end user.

Its agency Don't be Shy set about developing a new channel partner gateway app called Atlas. The name was taken from Greek mythology to mirror the origins of Promethean's name. The goal of Atlas was to allow Promethean's partner network to register and monitor deals, book demonstrations, and request marketing funds through a desktop and mobile-optimized app.

The objective was to market Promethean's flagship ActivPanel range to new and existing channel partners, through an insight-driven approach. This was so Promethean could ensure its marketing was relevant, differentiated and focused in the right areas.

Promethean's target audience for ActivPanel is varied due to the brand not selling its products directly. This means the strategy needed to take into account the channel, both in terms of sales enablement and new partner recruitment. They were also faced with the challenge of timing; school holidays, budget cycles, and time of year all had to be considered.

The strategy included content, contact and the launch of Atlas:

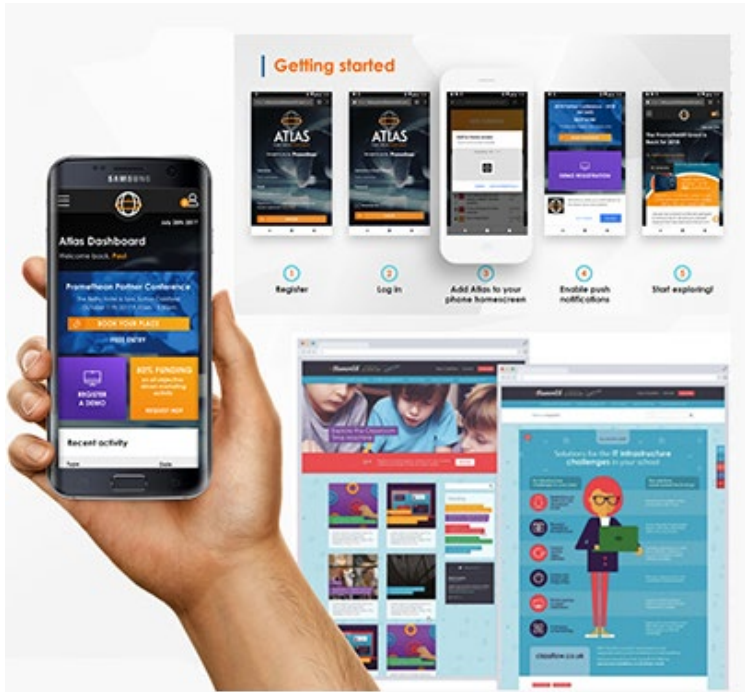
Content:

- › Thought-leadership to position Promethean as an industry leader in edtech.

- › Weekly edtech blogs delivered through the content hub ResourcEd.
- › A series of quick guides targeting head teachers covering topics such as maximizing edtech investment, and future proofing their classrooms.
- › A presentation template to help IT managers to pitch front-of-class technology to their budget-holders.
- › The third annual *State of Technology in Education* report.
- › Regular blog content targeted specifically to channel partners around topics such as how to talk to the discovered personas, distributor relations, and adding value to a sale.

Contact strategy:

- › A launch campaign for The Promethean Grant — a video-based competition that awarded 30 winning schools with a brand new ActivPanel for their school — ensuring under-privileged schools still have a chance to use edtech.
- › Social ads across Facebook and LinkedIn, targeting different personas through each channel.
- › A series of lead nurturing workflows in Pardot, to deliver deeper content to users as they engaged with Promethean over time. A complex lead scoring model built out in Pardot, taking into account various profiles and behavioural criteria to prioritize leads.
- › A defined lead routing process that passes MQLs through to partners via email notifications.
- › Atlas partner gateway.



Atlas launch strategy included:

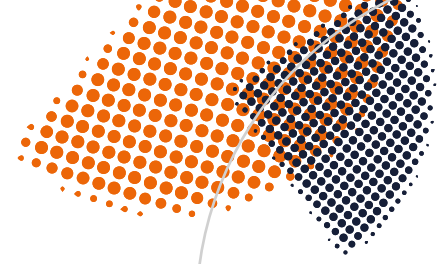
- › Launch campaign featuring a live webinar on the day of launch.
- › Video demo providing an overview of the features.
- › Marketing content served via push notifications within the app.
- › Nurture campaign designed to drive adoption and user retention.

The campaign's insight-driven approach has had a huge impact on the levels of engagement Promethean saw with its target audience — with content engagement and MQLs at an all-time high.

Atlas Partner Gateway registrations increased by 437% since launch. Partners registering demos increased by 1200%. Atlas has also outperformed expectations with regards to partner engagement; on average users now access four pages per visit, and spend 4:31 on the site.

“In 2017, we launched a brand new partner accreditation program. After launching the program we very quickly came to the realization that our current partner portal no longer supported the program or our partners in the way we needed. With Atlas, not only have we strengthened the partner program, and therefore the Promethean brand, but we’ve seen an unexpectedly high uplift in usage – so much so we’re having to expedite Phase two to handle the volume.”

Kristie Blacklock, channel marketing manager
UK & I, Promethean



Section 3

Measurement and tracking

How can you measure your channel relationships to know if they're working?

When B2B Marketing held a recent roundtable for marketing leaders on the subject of channel partners, the number one frustration expressed was the lack of transparency when it came to understanding whether the partnerships were working.

Most complained that getting feedback from their partners was tougher than drawing blood from a stone. This left them with little evidence how effective their channel relationships and programs actually were. This is alarming when you consider the money invested in joint marketing funds (JMF) or market development funds (MDF).

The ultimate measures of success of a channel program are revenue and opportunity creation, and you should be able to trace this closed business back to its source.

At Mitel, whenever there is joint marketing activity and it's footing 50% of the cost of this, partners need to provide what it calls 'proof of performance'. This includes evidence of the activity (photos from a trade show, for example), and the leads generated by the activity. The difficulty arises when the channel partner is already working those leads, so the update is not instant. Mitel's solution is to apply a campaign code to the lead when it is logged at deal registration. Doing so allows them to track that code through Salesforce.

The implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation in May 2018 has made tracking more complex. It's now harder to gain a common view of leads, due to the restrictions around personal data and transfer.

— *"As vendors, we need to make it easier for our partners to tell us about their success – and that's our problem, not theirs. Not duplicating records, being real-time, and making it easier for the partner to provide updates, and that's nirvana. It's tough, but we can get there."*

Andy Grant, Mitel

In addition to revenue and opportunity tracking, there are softer metrics that can track the health of a partner relationship. Tom Perry of Sherpa recommends the following.

- ▶ Time to cash/revenue: how long does it take to close deals?
- ▶ Time to self-sufficiency: when does the partner stop needing the support of the vendor in the sales and marketing process
- ▶ Accreditation metrics: has the partner invested in accreditation?

Avoid this mistake

When tech vendors want to expand their geographical reach, such as into Europe, they'll often pick six countries and try to go wide. They would be better off going deep in one market before moving onto a second says Tom Perry. Most US vendors will start in the UK to take advantage of the shared language, for example, before moving on to the Benelux countries, and then the Nordics. It's far better to go deep rather than wide to begin with, unless you have very deep pockets.



Award-winning case study

How Lenovo's channel marketing campaign did the business

Lenovo ThinkPads are the world's toughest laptops. Rationally they represent the best choice for many businesses. But rational arguments aren't always best remembered. Brand familiarity remains the prime driver of consideration. Where brands are less familiar, advocacy becomes key.

Lenovo is a Chinese multinational technology company who acquired IBM's personal computer business in 2005. ThinkPad is a line of business-oriented laptop computers known for their robust design, originally modelled after a traditional Japanese lunchbox. The ThinkPad range is developed to military-level specifications.

ThinkPad needed to step up from the moniker of being of just a tough 'work laptop', into being the only laptop you'll ever need. A superlative blend of substance and style. Critically, ThinkPad needed to engage with the channel audience of resellers on an emotional, as well as a rational level to make selling them straight forward. Positioning ThinkPad with the line 'It's the business' built on its workhorse reputation, while presenting the ThinkPad range as the single best choice to both end users and Lenovo's channel partners.

The 2017 global 'ThinkPad Stories' campaign rationally conveyed that ThinkPads were trusted to deliver anywhere on earth – and in space too, as the only laptops ever accredited for the International Space Station.

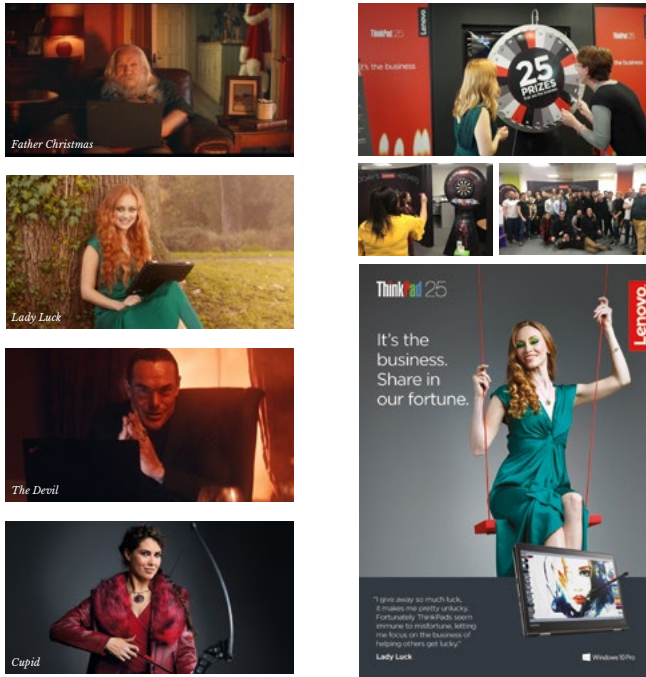
Agency April Six was briefed to source and deliver complementary ThinkPad Stories, which would be more memorable to UK audiences, while maintaining the testimonial construct. The campaign aimed to raise awareness of ThinkPads qualities with the reseller channels and end users, driving both increased sales, and greater engagement in the channel with the LoveThink loyalty program.

The campaign had two distinct audiences in a push-pull strategy: Channel partners to encourage them to get behind selling ThinkPads both on SPIFF days and throughout the campaign duration. And end-users where the aims were to drive awareness, consideration and demand for Thinkpads.

Both audiences are confronted by a plethora of dry, technical, product focused laptop advertising. Our key insight was to use humor and imagination to make the campaign memorable; playing against the category conventions, while staying true to ThinkPad's core product benefits.

The resellers are continually courted by technology brands trying to focus sales energy into their respective products, through SPIFF days, incentive schemes and sales enablement. One insight they shared was that many of the campaigns they were exposed to didn't feel cohesive – more a collection of different tactics under a superficial visual wrapper.

The campaign messaging pivoted on ThinkPad's workhorse heritage, by positioning them collectively to the UK audience with the line 'It's the business' which spoke equally to end-users and the channel of resellers and distributors.



The creative conceit was that these ‘business people’ were all from folklore.

The famous advocates:

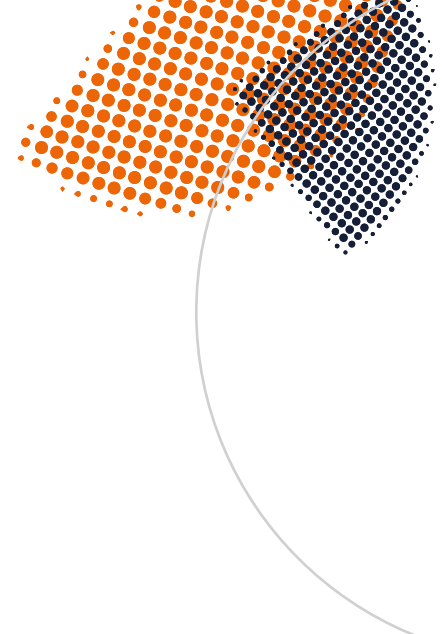
- › Father Christmas, running his global gifting operations from the sub-zero climate of the North Pole.
- › Lady Luck, the famous philanthropist. In the business of providing luck to so many others, she is continually left without luck herself. A situation that requires ThinkPad technology, that can cope with almost any misfortune.
- › The Devil, running the business of evil in temperatures that would test all but the toughest technology.
- › Cupid, running the business of love in the steamiest of environments.

The advocates shared the belief that ThinkPads were in their opinion ‘the business’; across film, display and experiential channel activities, ensuring a seamlessly integrated message was delivered memorably.

Channel audiences were introduced to the character testimonial films through electronic direct mail and social posts. The specific call to action directed them to register at Lenovo’s LoveThink incentive platform and download themed sales enablement packs from the partner portal.

Two campaign characters, Lady Luck and Cupid were brought to life to host 47 ‘It’s the business’ luck and love-themed channel SPIFF days. Salespeople could qualify to win additional prizes that were themselves ‘the business’, in themed challenges, by securing orders for ThinkPads.

Sales increased by 49% during first campaign phase. LoveThink loyalty program engagements grew 27% from 25% to 52% by the fifth week of the campaign. There were 270,000 plus YouTube views for Father Christmas testimonial film. And a 45% increase in LoveThink (loyalty programme) points accumulated during the campaign.



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