How to Build Strategic, Competitive Channel Programs: Smart Advice from 7 Channel Experts

Channeltivity®
CHANNEL MANAGEMENT MADE EASY.

With 80% of business being transacted through the channel, the stakes have never been higher to cut through the competition and ensure you're connecting with your partners in a way that creates value for everyone.

But how? We interviewed seven channel experts—all named a Channeltivity Channel Champion for their work in the channel—that all focus on the technology industry to deliver real-world, boots on the ground insight on how to build strong, competitive programs that attract, retain and motivate the right partners.

This eBook delivers a snapshot of their wisdom around creating high performing channels that you can incorporate into your organization's strategy.

Whitney Ondrejcka: Director, Partner Strategy

SmartAction

I think one of the biggest challenges that partner programs face as they continue to grow is focusing on scalability. And there are a few things that are really important to keep in mind when looking at how your company grows and how to also grow the partner program with that.

The first being of course organization. Something that may have worked for you when you had a partner team of five or 10 partners is probably not going to be the same strategy that you use moving forward when you have 30 to 40 partners.

It's really important to put yourself in your partner's shoes so really exercising a lot of empathy with partners and identifying every single partner is completely different. And they have different resources. They have a different sales team. Really identify where they're lacking and where your company can supplement and complement their offering.

At SmartAction we believe that there should be a really great balance between humans and technology; automating the pieces that you're able to automate while still having that human-centric approach. And that's really the same approach that we take with our partner program.

Channeltivity has really allowed us to automate those mundane repetitive processes that are certainly vital to the success of your program and very important from a data perspective. But we're also able to then refocus our energy on the human element and creating those foundational relationships with our partners.

Read more and watch Whitney's video

> "The strategy that you have on day one for your partner program is most likely not going to be the strategy that you have on day one hundred fifty. Allow yourself to check in with yourselves as a company, check in with your partners, do a gut check, and make sure that the strategy that you're taking to move forward is the correct one."

Greg Harris: Co-Founder & Managing Director

Cloud Distribution, Ltd.

a partner perspective:

It's really about how a vendor can make itself more attractive and easy to do business with that is very often one of the deciding factors that our partner and ourselves will look at when making a selection in terms of whether we go to market with that vendor or not.

A vendor partner portal is a great way of making that vendor easier to do business with. It provides a consistent interface for the partners. It provides operational consistency for the partners. For instance, we as a vendor, we as a distributor, have to provide a certain amount of information for each and every vendor. And it changes from one to the other. It's actually difficult for us to make a decision as to and try to second-guess what that vendor wants.

So for me, the portal, whilst it's clearly very important to have a human element to anything relationship between vendor, distributor, and partner, the portal basically allows us to put resources in front of partners so they can get to the information as quickly as physically possible, but frankly therefore just maximizing the amount of time that they're selling that vendors products or services.

Read more and watch Greg's video

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Matt Moriarty: Director of Product Marketing at Zoll Data

former Digital and Channel Marketing Manager at Brother Mobile Solutions, Inc.

If you can master these few things, your program will be successful. Number one, deal registration. We had to master it and I think most companies need to be able to do it and be able to do it very easily for the partner. The more complicated you make anything for a partner they're not going to want to interact with you or your program.

Also a lead distribution module because as much as you want that partner to be able to come in and give you new opportunities you have to be able to show that loyalty back to your partners by distributing leads to them and tracking it.

Be able to track your metrics. Be able to see things and be able to report out of them in a very easy way.

If leadership asks you a question or they ask for metrics and you can't provide that in a quick timeframe they usually look at your program is not doing well. Even though the numbers might be great, if it takes you a month to pull together your stats they're not going to be happy with it.

Read more and watch Matt's video

"If I had to give any advice to a channel manager looking to grow their program, I'd say highlight your top three, four, maybe even five areas that you really want to get done and start with those.

And select a platform that can grow with you as well."

Theresa Caragol: Founder and Principal Consultant

AchieveUnite, LLC

I see three things failing in partner programs today. One is companies take a transactional mindset instead of a partner-for-life mindset. We need to be thinking as vendors and service providers about our partners as extensions of our organization and as partners for life. We've done extensive research on partner lifetime value and we can quantify now exactly what the predictors are for long-term partner successful relationships. So that's one.

Two is the complexity I see in these partner programs is astronomical. It's too much business planning that takes hours and multiple tabs to complete and isn't actionable at the end of the session. MDF that is so complex that it has many, many pages to a guide, and partners don't know how to take advantage of it. So this complexity that has to get reduced is really important.

And then the third thing is we fail on what the right strategy is. Evaluate it constantly. Every six months to a year we have to evaluate our strategy and make sure that we've got the right plan and we're executing the right plan to be successful.

Automation is a critical part of channel programs, and if you think about going back to our foundation of the house, if we don't have automation in place it's very hard for us to scale to do business with more than one-to-one transactions. So the automation the PRMs– they're the foundation of the house.

Companies like Channeltivity who offer very simple easy-to-use solutions are really critical in building these successful programs long term.

Read more and watch Theresa's video

> "You have to ask yourselves: Do we have to have the right foundation that allows us to do one-to-many, and do we have the right people with the right skill set so they can be successful?"

Jayme Kiester: VP of Channel Partnerships

HGS

Building relationships is paramount for success. Whether your channel program is a reseller or referral program, the partners who are bringing you into their client base want to make sure they are the trusted advisor. To do this, there must be trust between partners as they are putting their name out on the line by promoting you and your company. We want to make sure they are comfortable doing that, and that they are providing the best service possible when representing us. Self-service tools, such as Channeltivity, are critical to support this and to enable quicker onboarding and ease of working with us.

Organizations tend to look at the customer journey only. But we must do the same for our partners and analyze the touchpoints we have with them as well. From the moment we onboard them to the support of that first sale, we must make sure we are equipping them for success. For partners, look at the journey, look at touchpoints, and learn how to fill the gaps if there are any.

Sometimes those gaps can be fixed with better communications or better process. Also, as I've mentioned before don't expect that success will come from the relationship piece only. Use tools such as Channelitivity to provide that self-service approach.

[Read more of Jayme's interview]

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Jeff Miller: Channel Manager

Formerly Cyberstone

I think beyond just having a killer product—because let's face it everybody says they have the best product, right?—so beyond that, I think it's a matter of education.

I spend a lot of my time, nights and weekends, learning new cybersecurity regulations and then I pour that into our partners. Make them smart people. Make them understand the buying circumstances, or the market conditions and objections, so when they're in a sales conversation they're powerful. And it's beyond just saying I can do the best penetration test or I can offer the best service. It's really educating them and getting into the customers head. Why would the customer buy? What's their vantage point?

In addition to educating our partners, I think one of the biggest ways that we're successful is we offer a variety of different ways to be successful. So things like, hey let's do a Lunch and Learn. Let's do a webinar series. Let's do a breakfast-and-learn, which people are starting to do more of. Can I write you an article for your newsletter? Are you in any associations that we can amplify and have one voice and reach 100 different companies?

So there are costs and benefits, and stepping through those different strategies is important for us.

Read more and watch Jeff's video

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Suzanne Parent: Manager of Partner Programs and Sales

Veriato

Even before you impact the success of your company, when you define a channel program and you want it to grow you must look at what you are offering. You must define what kind of channel you're going to focus on. And that could be a reseller, a VAR, an MSP, or a distributor.

You must be clear on what your program is or isn't for your partners, and how it benefits them and how they can make money. You must also include your direct sales team and put in place a channel-neutral program.

Include Deal Registration to track the net new deals the partner brings you. Do all those things, because if the partner sees that they can make money and work with you and you're reliable, they'll be with you for a long time.

Let your partners know you're there. Let them know you will work with them and you are flexible. Those are the biggest, biggest things.

Read more of Suzanne's interview

"Stay organized, communicate often, and always understand the needs of the market so you can best adjust your benefits or offer."

Growing your Channel Program?
Explore Channeltivity.

Channeltivity is a partner relationship management software platform that helps companies build strong relationships, optimize partner productivity and support new sales.

The Channeltivity platform is used and recommended by many channel programs to deliver effective and engaging partner training.

Channeltivity is easy to use, fast to set up, and connects to Salesforce.com.

To find out why 40,000+ channel sales professionals around the globe depend on us, and to experience the solution through our hands-on demo, call 877-226-2564 or visit https://www.channeltivity.com

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