

MAXIMIZING CHANNEL PARTNER ENGAGEMENT



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THE CHALLENGE

Leveraging your channel partner relationships is a key strategy for expanding market reach, driving revenue growth, and scaling operations. However, the success of these partnerships is hinged on active and consistent engagement.

Are you making the most of opportunities to engage your channel partners?

THE RISKS OF UNDER-ENGAGEMENT

Missed revenue opportunities, strained relationships and loss of competitive edge are just a handful of challenges that can stem from insufficient partner engagement. Disengaged partners are less motivated to promote your brand, unlikely to renew contracts, and more open to exploring and, ultimately, acting on opportunities with competitors.

The downstream impacts of partner disengagement include:

- Declining sales and revenue
- Diminished brand visibility and market share
- Higher customer acquisition costs
- Loss of key partnerships to competitors

Conversely, strategic partner engagement delivers measurable business value, such as:

- Expanded market reach and new customer acquisition
- Increased sales velocity and revenue streams
- Enhanced brand reputation and competitive edge
- Stronger partner loyalty and retention

If there's one imperative for maximizing the return on your channel partner relationships, it's active engagement. To make it a reality, consider how implementing these best practices can help refine your program's strategy.





BUILDING AN INTUITIVE PARTNER PORTAL

A user-friendly partner portal acts as the gateway for engaging partners by providing convenient access to resources, streamlining interactions, and centralizing support. It speaks to partners on your behalf, acting as an extension of your relationship in between more personalized opportunities.

CRITICAL PRACTICES FOR CREATING AN EFFECTIVE PORTAL:

- **Optimizing the mobile experience.** Build the portal with a responsive design to ensure portability and accessibility on any device, enabling partners to engage anywhere.
- **Prioritizing simple and intuitive navigation.** Minimize clutter and make desired resources easy to locate with logical architecture that reduces frustration and improves usability.
- **Personalizing the experience.** Incorporate interactive elements, like welcome messages, partner dashboard customization, and other personal touches that help partners feel valued and connected to your brand.
- **Centralizing access to resources.** Establish a unified hub for sales collateral, training materials, brand guidelines, and support avenues to eliminate the hassle of accessing content distributed across multiple channels.
- **Streamlining self-service.** Provide independent access to account management, transactions, and support ticket creation to boost convenience and enable 24/7 assistance.
- **Implementing tracking and gamification features.** Add visual milestones, like goal progress bars and achievement badges, to motivate engagement and tap into partners' competitive spirit.
- **Optimizing your partner portal.** Enact a positive user experience to demonstrate your commitment to making partnerships easy, enjoyable and actionable, while driving overall engagement.

PROVIDING KEY RESOURCES

Empowering partners with training and resources enables them to effectively promote and sell your offerings. The more relevant and purposeful material you provide to partners, the more aligned they become with your brand, and the more marketable you become.

Offer partners highly effective and valued resources, such as:



TRAINING SUPPORT

- Onboarding training to explain your brand promise, products, and key talking points
- Ongoing sales methodology training to improve pitch skills and objection handling
- Technical training to develop product expertise and the ability to articulate details and value
- Updates when new products or major features are released



SALES & MARKETING COLLATERAL

- Printed sales sheets with product features, benefits, and competitive comparisons
- Presentation slide decks tailored for prospect demos and potential objections
- Imagery, logos, and brand guidelines for partners to incorporate into their own materials
- Customizable email templates, social posts, and banner ads
- Branded merchandise for partners to display and use as giveaways



RESPONSIVE SUPPORT

- Staffed help desk for rapid assistance via phone, chat, and email
- Online knowledge base with manuals, FAQs, and troubleshooting guides
- Forum community enabling peer knowledge sharing
- Regular touchpoints via newsletters, check-ins, and success reviews

Show partners your dedication to them and your mutual long-term goals by offering access to these resources and providing your ongoing support. On the other side of active engagement to boost your partners' competency and support their promotional efforts is alignment and loyalty through the wins and the challenges.

MAINTAINING BRAND CONSISTENCY

Uniformity is essential for reinforcing your brand identity – for your partners and public audiences. To avoid brand dilution, partners must represent your brand in a consistent manner through all their communications, promotions, signage, appearances, and collateral. Try these proactive steps to ensure brand consistency:



PROVIDE PARTNERS WITH BRAND STYLE GUIDES

covering language use, logo placement, design aesthetics, typography, and other details.



SUPPLY MARKETING COLLATERAL AND ASSETS

so partners do not have to create their own.



INCLUDE BRANDING REQUIREMENTS in partner contracts to make expectations clear.



ENCOURAGE FIELD SALES REPS TO STAY IN TOUCH WITH PARTNERS and regularly schedule visits and sales calls to catch any inconsistencies.



OFFER BRANDING ORIENTATION AND TRAINING to educate partners on brand standards.

Consistent branding is valuable. Not only does it improve recognition and perception of your brand, but it also enables partners to seamlessly blend their identities with yours.



PERSONALIZING FOR EACH PARTNER

Partners are vastly diverse in their strengths, business models, challenges, and goals. Personalized engagement that acknowledges these differences shows that you distinguish partners as valued individuals, not generic vendors.

Use these tactics to deliver more tailored partner experiences:






- **Segment partners by specific factors**, like partner type, business size, tech preferences, and geographic market.
- **Customize onboarding processes and training plans** based on each partner's baseline capabilities and needs.
- **Develop unique success plans and incentive programs** for each partner that align with their objectives.
- **Craft targeted communications and offers** tailored to partners' specialties and customer profiles.
- **Provide hands-on coaching** to address individual partners' skill gaps impacting performance.
- **Send personalized congratulatory messages** to celebrate partner milestones, such as new customer wins and increased sales volumes.
- **Utilize channel sales reps or account managers** to deliver personalized training and recognition so that encounters come from a person rather than the brand.

Personalization will require extra effort and forethought, but the payoff in deeper partner relationships and satisfaction is sure to result in success.

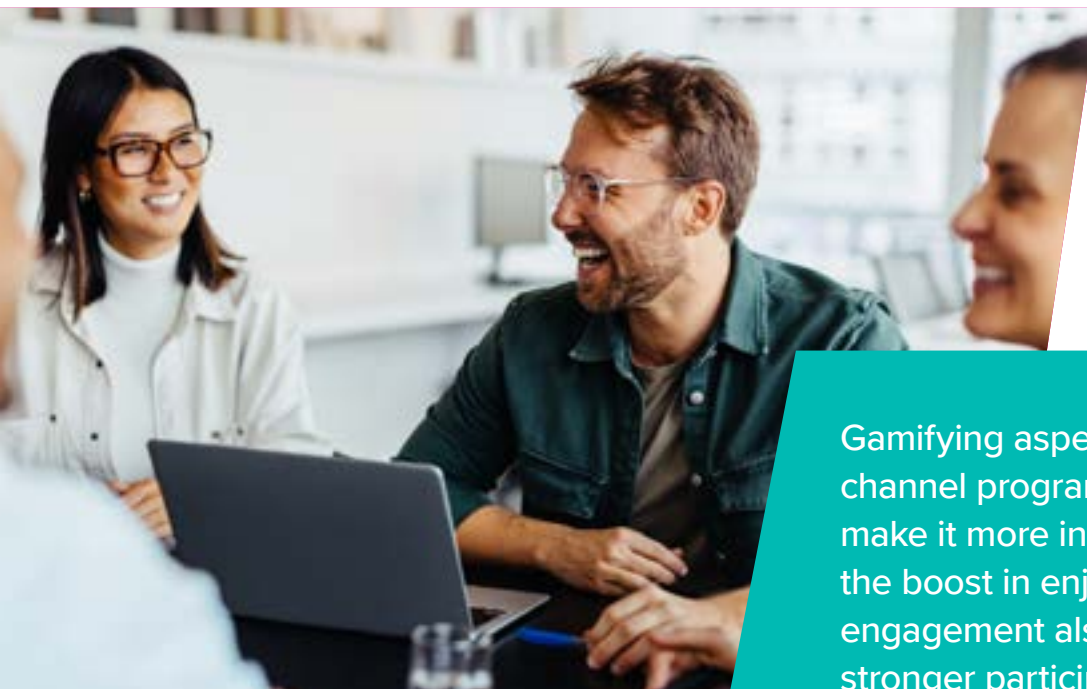
INCORPORATING GAMIFICATION

Gamification applies game mechanics and experiences within business contexts to drive engagement through fun, interactive elements. These game dynamics tap into partners' competitive spirit, deliver recognition, and break up tedium in mundane tasks required for the partnership.

Explore ways to gamify aspects of your program through:

-  **Progress trackers**, such as points bars and status levels, to give partners a visual as they complete activities.
-  **Performance leaderboards** so partners can compare successes and benchmark against peers.
-  **Challenges, quests, or missions** that partners complete cooperatively or competitively.
-  **Spin & win games, prize giveaways and surprise rewards** that add excitement.
-  **Badges, trophies, and certificates** awarded for milestones and accomplishments.

If you want to make your program more alluring to partners and capable of spurring their excitement, give them the opportunity to “win the day.”



Gamifying aspects of your channel program doesn't just make it more interactive, but the boost in enjoyment and engagement also leads to stronger participation.

OFFERING MEANINGFUL INCENTIVES

A compelling incentive program attracts the best partners, motivates performance, and boosts partner loyalty. However, this outcome of driving action and participation is reliant on the presence of powerful extrinsic motivators.

Build your strategy around a variety of incentive offerings to inspire action:



FINANCIAL REWARDS – the program offers spiffs for new partner registrations or customer referrals, revenue share based on sales volumes, rebates on purchased products and services, and discounted or free access to tools, events, and education



MERCHANDISE – the selection encompasses high-end accessories like sunglasses, handbags, wallets, and watches, innovative electronics and gadgets, consumables including wine, fruit, and chocolate, as well as subscription delivery services catering to various hobbies and interests.



RECOGNITION – the program includes highlights for top partners in newsletters, social media, and press releases, award ceremonies and galas for regional and global partners of the year, sharing customer case studies showcasing partner success stories, and offering achievement badges for display on partners' social media accounts, websites, or even as vehicle decals/stickers.



EXPERIENTIAL REWARDS – the program offers all-expenses-paid trips to conferences, partner summits, or exotic retreats, VIP access to exclusive industry events, trade show lounges, and dinners, and outdoor adventures such as white-water rafting or hiking trips for top partners.

Keep in mind how offering a diverse selection of meaningful incentives satisfies partners' varying motivations - whether financial, social, material, or experiential. Recognizing outstanding performance also boosts partner pride, and doing so through rewards that are meaningful to them will spur a sense of accomplishment and personal value associated with your brand.

ENABLING COMMUNITY AND COLLABORATION

Partners should not operate as isolated vendors; you want to cultivate a community. Doing so fosters a collaborative culture where the collective shares knowledge and grows together.

Act on these tactics to promote collaboration with partners:

- **Create an online partner community** for idea exchange, advice seeking, and sharing best practices.
- **Host virtual or in-person events for partners** to network, brainstorm, and collaborate.
- **Arrange ride-alongs for partners** to observe and learn from peers in action.
- **Organize focus groups of partners** who serve similar types of customers to identify shared challenges and successes.
- **Spotlight individual partners as experts** within the community to boost their pride and status.
- **Gamify participation** by awarding badges, points, and leader boards for active community members.

Remember that partners feel valued as contributors, not just as sales channels. Embracing a team mentality and emphasizing the importance of your partners' roles promotes a unified approach to support goals and values that are foundational to your program's success.





PROVIDING ONGOING LEARNING

Training should not end after initial partner onboarding. Creating space for learning opportunities will help partners sharpen skills over time. It also signals to them that you value continuous growth, and that they will continue to have your support through the longevity of your partnership. Apply these opportunities to promote, provide, and support continuous learning:

1. Support growth objectives through recurring training webinars, workshops, and certifications – and allow partners to provide input on desired topics.
2. Offer access to online educational modules, like courses, guides, and peer learning resources.
3. Invite subject matter experts and industry thought leaders to present learning sessions.
4. Sponsor partners to attend relevant external conferences and educational events.
5. Offer advanced development programs, mentorships, and coaching for top partners to take their expertise to the next level.
6. Provide training incentives to motivate learning, like points, discounts, prizes, and achievement badges.

Are there any check boxes you've left empty? We can help you fill the gaps. Reach out to Maritz and see how we can make sales, loyalty and employee motivation programs stronger in any market.



SOLICITING AND ACTING ON FEEDBACK

Partners approach the program with a fresh and unique perspective. They have invaluable insights into the health of the partnership and where improvements may be possible. Regularly collecting feedback cultivates an open, transparent relationship, and helps you know where you may be able to improve.

Use these effective practices to promote an elevated feedback rhythm:



Conduct periodic satisfaction surveys asking partners about their overall experience, challenges, and suggestions.



Seek feedback following interactions, like onboarding, training events, or support ticket resolution, to identify areas for improvement.



Encourage open communication and continuous feedback through an online portal, email, and one-on-one conversations.



Demonstrate your prioritization of partner feedback by summarizing key insights, explaining how you will address suggestions, and employing a follow-up protocol.



Track and report enhancements made based on partner input to close the feedback loop.



Soliciting feedback and, more importantly, acting upon it is important for creating an environment in which partners believe their voice matters. It's a simple step, but taking corrective action will drastically improve your partnership and promote partner loyalty.

CREATING URGENCY

Driving immediate partner action during key campaigns requires instilling a sense of urgency. You need to compel them as much as possible as quickly as possible. But how?

Try using these trusted methods to generate urgency:



OFFER LIMITED-TIME PROMOTIONS, INCENTIVES, OR PERKS, like flash sales or expiring coupons.



USE TICKING COUNTDOWN CLOCKS showing time remaining for an exclusive offer or competition.



ANNOUNCE PRODUCTS AVAILABLE IN LIMITED QUANTITIES to those who act fast to tap into scarcity principles and make the opportunity more desirable.



ATTEMPT "LAST CHANCE" MESSAGING to re-engage inactive partners before removing them.



HIGHLIGHT SPOTS REMAINING FOR CONTESTS and elevate current leaders to spur competitors.

Urgency prompts partners to act on your offerings now rather than delay action. By actively communicating time sensitivity and rewarding action, you'll be able to draw attention and prompt quicker responses.



RECOGNIZING MILESTONES

Validating partner efforts and celebrating their achievements isn't just important. It's critical for strengthening connections and furthering a sense of loyalty to your brand. When milestone recognition is an active part of your strategy, you reinforce positive partner behaviors and accomplishments you want to encourage long-term.

Take advantage of these opportunities to recognize partner milestones:

- **Send customized congratulatory messages** via email, social media, and direct mail for major partner accomplishments.
- **Distribute “award press releases”** announcing partners who accomplish significant growth, customer acquisition, or revenue milestones.
- **Feature partner success stories** in newsletters, podcasts, and conferences.
- **Celebrate yearly achievements** by inviting select partners to gala events or award ceremonies.

Recognition is powerful, positive reinforcement. Spotlighting partner accomplishments not only boosts morale, but it also attracts new partners who aspire to be honored for their efforts.

COLLABORATING ON GOALS

Taking steps to align partner goals with your own is a non-negotiable for mutual success. When objectives are defined, your efforts are more focused, the steps are clearer, and the results speak for themselves.

Embrace these best practices for collaborative goal setting:

- **Discuss your overall business goals** and how partners contribute during planning sessions.
- **Provide templates and frameworks for partners** to draft SMART goal plans for the year.
- **Review partner plans to ensure alignment** and provide guidance to rework any mismatching goals.
- **Establish joint KPIs both parties will monitor** to track progress, like revenue contribution, new customer acquisition, and other benchmarks.
- **Schedule periodic check-ins to assess progress** and adjust goals as needed based on actual performance and environmental changes.
- **Motivate attainment** by tying goal achievement to incentives and recognition.

Jointly owned goals foster partner buy-in, and as market conditions evolve, ongoing collaboration will ensure sustained alignment. Ongoing collaboration ensures sustained alignment as market conditions evolve.



IN CLOSING

Strategic partner engagement maximizes the value of your collaborative relationships to deliver mutual growth and revenue upside. Using the best practices in this guide, you can optimize engagement across the partner lifecycle – from recruitment and onboarding to ongoing enablement, communication, and recognition.

Which strategies resonated most with your current needs and opportunities?

Determine priority areas of focus and start applying these tactics to see the power of active partner engagement. With partners fully invested in and aligned with your brand, you can accomplish shared business goals neither could easily obtain alone.



Reach out to Maritz to discover more strategies and solutions that can help you enhance your channel program and engage your channel partners.

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