

## Empowering your channel partners

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It takes considerable effort to set up a new sales channel partner. Yet how many of these relationships are really successful? All too often the relationship is launched in a blaze of optimism, but the *raison d'être* – more sales – fails to materialise. Often this is because too little thought was given to how the channel partner will go about selling your offering.

Neither are established channel relationships immune from this problem; just because they sold your previous product successfully does not mean they will automatically have the same level of success with a new product. So how can you make sure your channel partnership is a success?

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### The common situation today

#### Sales training for channel partners

When it comes to helping channel partners to sell, many organisations do precious little. Usually any activity in this area is concentrated solely on sales training. The salespeople in the channel partner's organisation come along to a training session, where they learn about the features of the various offerings, and are then encouraged to go away and sell them.

#### The problem with sales training

For complex products and services, it is necessary to provide sales training for your channel partners' salespeople, but it is certainly not sufficient to ensure

you achieve maximum benefit from your sales channels. Sales training for channel partners suffers from a number of drawbacks:

1. It can only be delivered to those who actually turn up for the course. The "no show" rate can be high for sales training courses, particularly close to year-ends and quarter-ends.
2. While the course is in progress, attendees may pay attention and learn key messages. But once they are back on the road or at the desk, and dealing with day-to-day business issues, these key points are soon forgotten and salespeople will make up their own messages.
3. Salespeople move around a lot. After spending a great deal of time and effort on sales training for a channel partner, six months to a year later you could find that up to 30% of the salespeople you have trained no longer sell your product, either because they have been reassigned or because they have left the partner's organisation.

### Empowering your partners' salespeople

#### Raise your profile

Salespeople, especially those in your channel partners' organisations, are busy people. They are likely to be charged not only with selling your product, but a whole host of other products, some from competing organisations. If you are going to achieve a level of effectiveness that is above mediocre, you must provide the salespeople in your channels with sales support material that is not "just the normal stuff". You must stand out from the crowd, empower your channel partners' salespeople and above all, make selling your offerings easy and straightforward.



### Provide something effective and different

So, if you do just one thing to improve sales effectiveness in your channel partners' organisations, I would recommend this: think long and hard about what those remote salespeople are going to need to be effective at selling your products and services, and provide it to them in a concise, clear format. Nothing else you can do will have a greater effect. Some pointers to help you:

- **Keep it short and to the point:** the key to making your channel partners' salespeople more effective is to provide them with the information they need, in a structure that they can understand, and in a concise format.
- **Tell them about your offering:** tell your partners' salespeople what your proposition is, why customers want it and what benefits it provides.
- **Tell them who to sell to:** identify the types of customers who will buy, what drives them to buy and who are the likely decision makers.
- **Tell them how to compete:** be frank about your capabilities and how you fare against the competition. Tell the salespeople where your strengths lie, and forewarn them about areas of weakness.
- **Let them know what to expect:** what sort of deals they will get into, how long it will take to close a sale – and where they can seek further assistance.
- **Don't do it yourself:** get this done by experts who are external to your organisation. It is unlikely that your own staff will have the time, the skills or the level of detachment necessary to do a good job.



### Conclusions

Think of the salespeople in your channel partner's organisation. They have a tough job. They have to sell your offerings without direct access to your technical or marketing people. They cannot so easily use the informal network to pick-up sales tips and ideas. You need to provide them with something that acts as a "stay behind sales coach" that will still be with them after you and your Partner Manager have returned to your office. You need to develop effective sales support material that raises your profile and improves sales effectiveness within the channel partner's organisation. That is the best way by far to empower your channel partners.

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