

# CHANNEL/ PARTNER MARKETING

## BENCHMARK SURVEY

To Boost Prioritized Performance Metrics, B2B Executives Plan To Expand Partner Ecosystems, Invest In Channel Technology Stack



SPONSORED BY



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

B2B executives are clearly optimistic that their indirect sales and marketing programs will gain momentum in 2021. More than 90% of respondents to the first annual *Channel/Partner Marketing Benchmark Survey* conducted by *Channel Marketer Report* and *Demand Gen Report* said they expect to increase revenue directly attributed to their partner ecosystems this year.

The majority of respondents also anticipate gains in their individual primary measure of channel program success, which range from attributable revenue to account retention. Almost half of the respondents are confident of achieving a significant increase in their prioritized metric.

---

**91% OF B2B LEADERS EXPECT TO INCREASE REVENUE DIRECTLY ATTRIBUTED TO THEIR PARTNER ECOSYSTEMS.**

---

Marketing leaders are making appropriate investments to reach their goals. More than three-quarters of the respondents are adding to the ranks as well as the variety of their channel ecosystems. More than two-thirds of the respondents have bumped up their channel marketing programs. And many companies are planning investments in program-supporting solutions to boost partner training, incentivize engagement and optimize channel engagement.

Survey respondents clearly recognize that their success will require upgrades to their programs. Fewer than one fifth of them described their company's current channel programs as very effective. Almost 40% said that their current channel stack was insufficient for current needs.

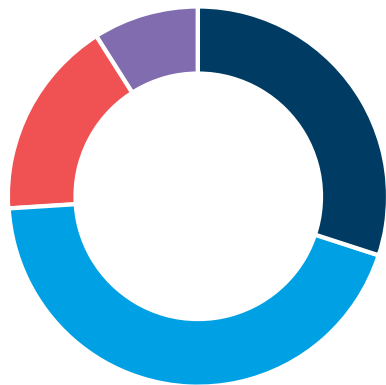
## RISE IN CHANNEL-GENERATED REVENUE EXPECTED

The majority of B2B executives and channel leaders are forecasting significant gains in partner-generated revenue in 2021, the most prioritized measure of success. Nearly three-quarters of them expect increases of 11% or more.

Healthy gains are also anticipated for other prioritized measures, including channel acquired new customers, channel general leads, channel partner engagement and retention of channel-assigned accounts. Almost half of the respondents said they expect to see a significant increase in their primary success metric.

---

### By what percentage do you expect to increase revenue attributable to channel partners in the next year?



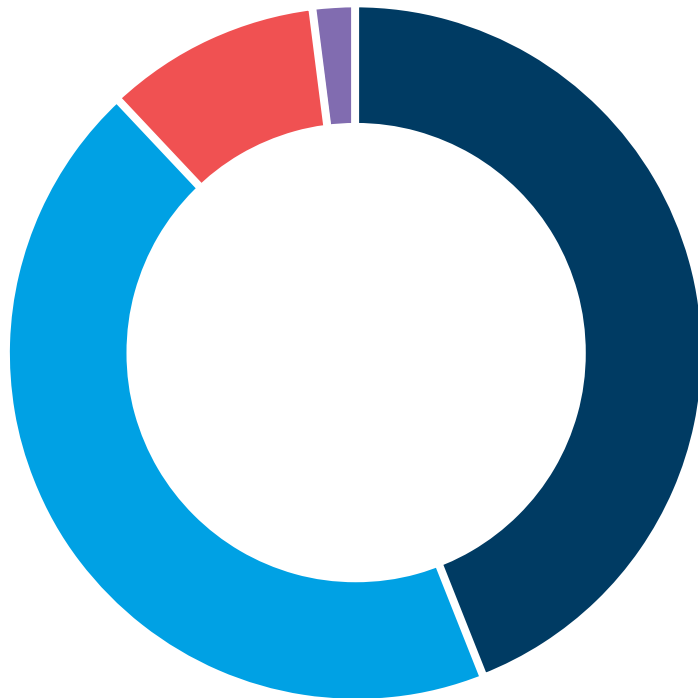
**30%** More than 20%

**44%** Increase by 11% to 20%

**17%** Increase by 1% to 10%

**9%** Unchanged

## How would you describe your goals of your channel partner program as related to your primary measure of success?



**44%** Significant increase

**44%** Marginal increase

**10%** No change

**2%** Slight decrease

# CHANNEL ECOSYSTEMS EXPAND TO ALIGN WITH BUYER'S JOURNEY, CUSTOMER LIFECYCLE

Aligning go-to-market strategies with evolving B2B buyer journeys requires business leaders to engage a broader base of partners more effectively. In his [annual review of channel program technology](#), Jay McBain, Forrester's Principal Analyst, Channel Partnerships & Alliances, said, "With the trifurcation of partners into influencer, transactional and retention categories, managing a plethora of concurrent activities without sufficient automation is no longer possible."

B2B executives are clearly paying attention. The *CMR/DGR* survey reveals that companies are evolving their channel programs to include a wider range of partner types to ensure that potential clients are being appropriately influenced, that no new opportunities are being missed and that customers are successfully retained again, and again, and again.

# Which of these channel partner or indirect sales and marketing programs have you worked within the last 12 months?

We have a network of partners — independent resellers, distributors, managed service providers, agents, and/or dealers — who market and sell our products or services



68%

We have a structured referral program that compensates non-selling partners for generating leads that are ultimately converted to customers



13%

We incentivize, reward, or otherwise compensate a variety of partners — thought-leaders, influencers, and/or subject matter experts — to influence potential customers



9%



## What are your company's plans in regard to the number of partners in your channel ecosystem?

Significant increase



Marginal increase



No change



Slight decrease



Significant decrease



Channel partner recruiters will be busy in 2021. Survey data reveals that more than 75% of the respondents will boost the number of partners in their ecosystem.

Although referral and influencer programs are currently represented in a minority of channel programs, a significant percentage of respondents plan to implement them this year. Thirty percent said they will launch a referral program in 2021. Incentivized influencer programs will be implemented by slightly more companies — 33%.

Of the respondents to the survey that currently do not run any indirect sales or marketing program, plans are in place at two-thirds of those companies to build influencer ecosystems.

Business leaders could be credited with setting a pretty high bar for their partner programs in 2021, based on their own assessment of their current programs and the ability of their channel stack to provide necessary support. Less than 20% of the respondents described their partner programs as “very effective.”

### How would you describe your company’s current overall program to sell and market products and services through your network of channel partners?





## How will your channel marketing budget be adjusted to support your company's overall program to sell and market products through channel partners?

Significant increase



Marginal increase



No change



Slight reduction



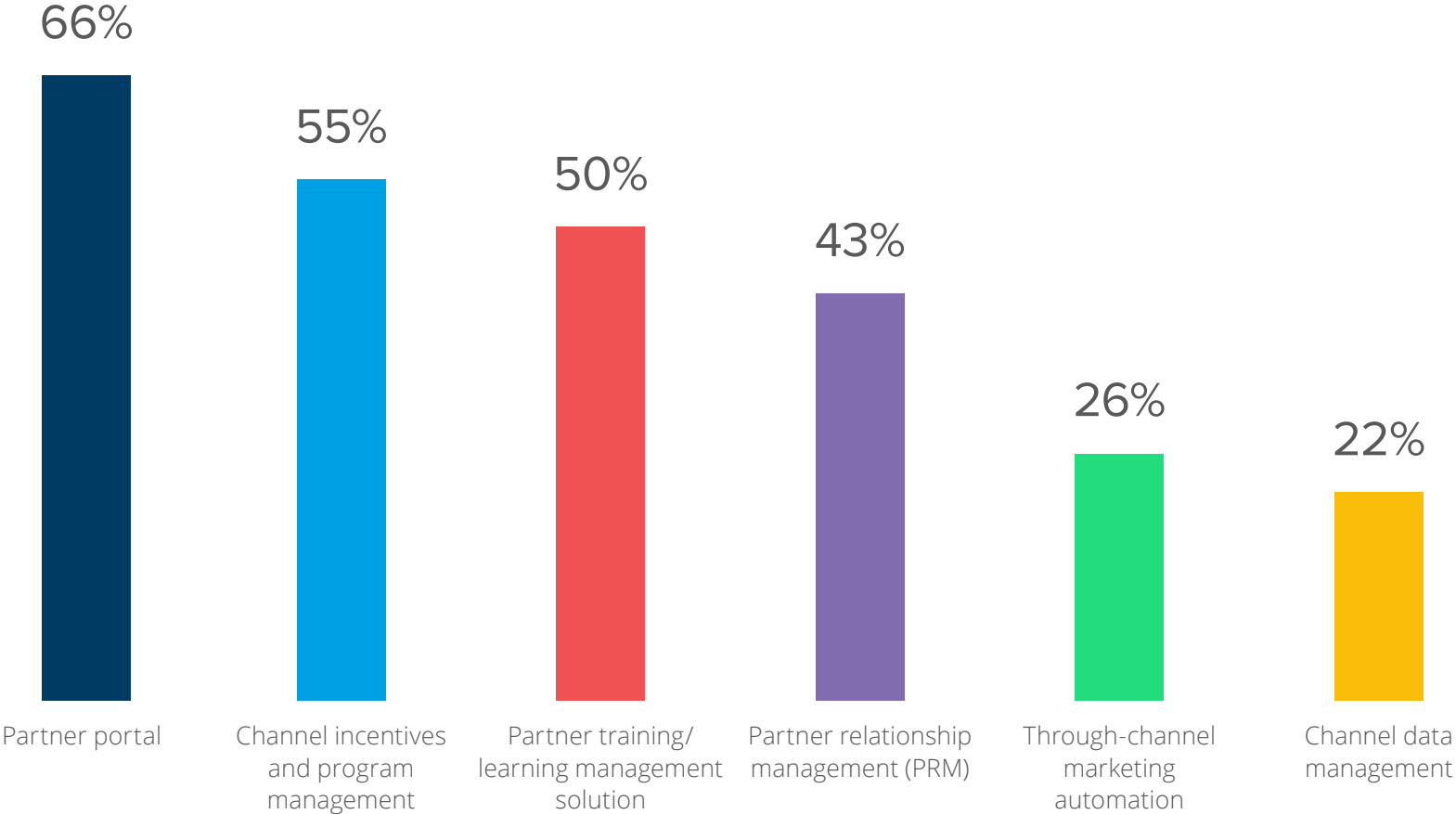
Significant reduction



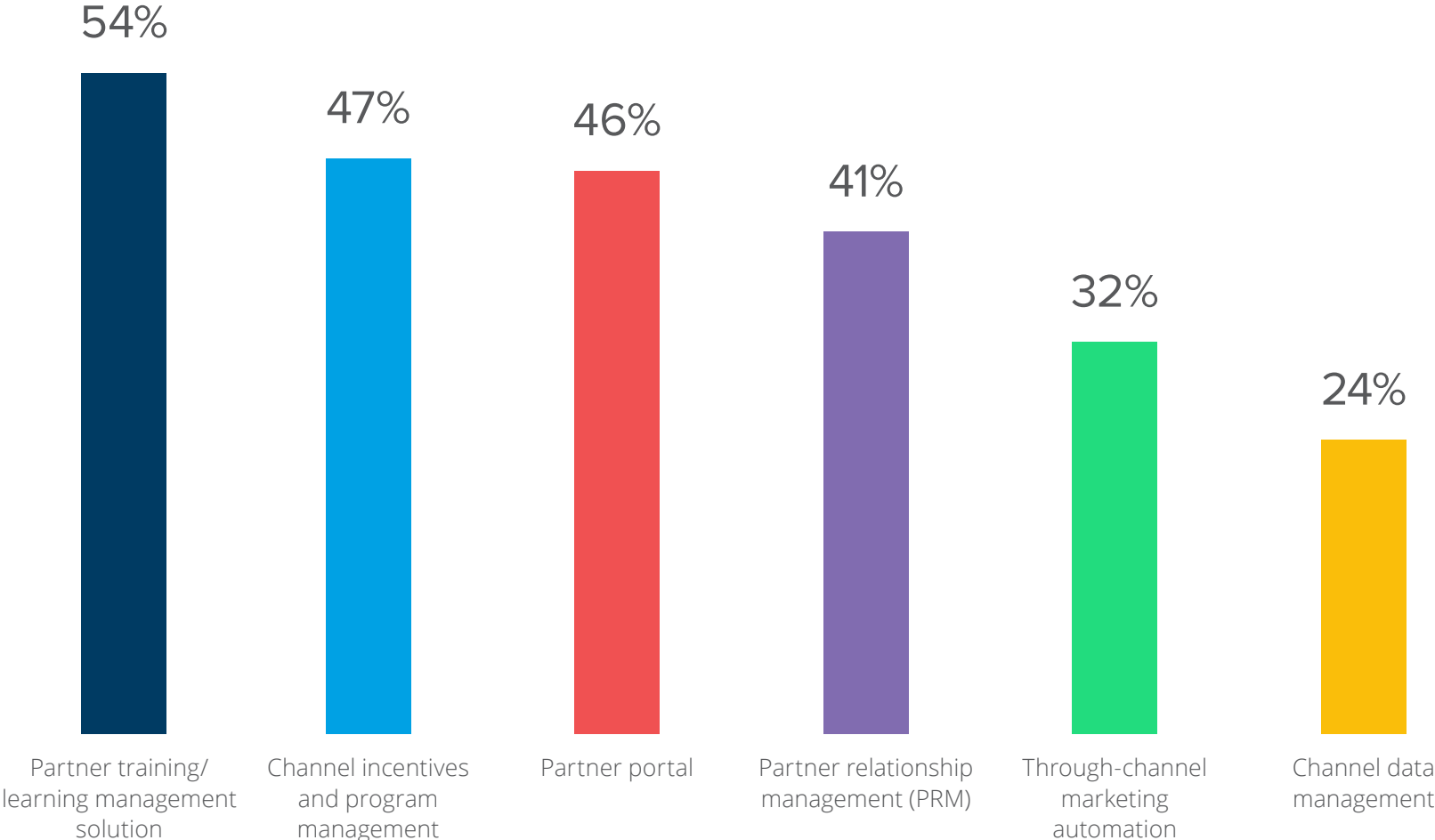
B2B marketers have implemented a variety of partner program-enabling tools and technologies that they describe as either high-performing and scalable to support growth (23.3%) or currently right-sized to drive near-term revenue goals.

Nonetheless, deeper investments are planned to assemble a channel technology stack that will provide more robust support for current and planned initiatives.

# Which of the following channel partner program solutions do you currently utilize to support your channel partner sales and marketing program?



# Which of the following channel product supporting solutions will you upgrade or implement in the next 12 months?



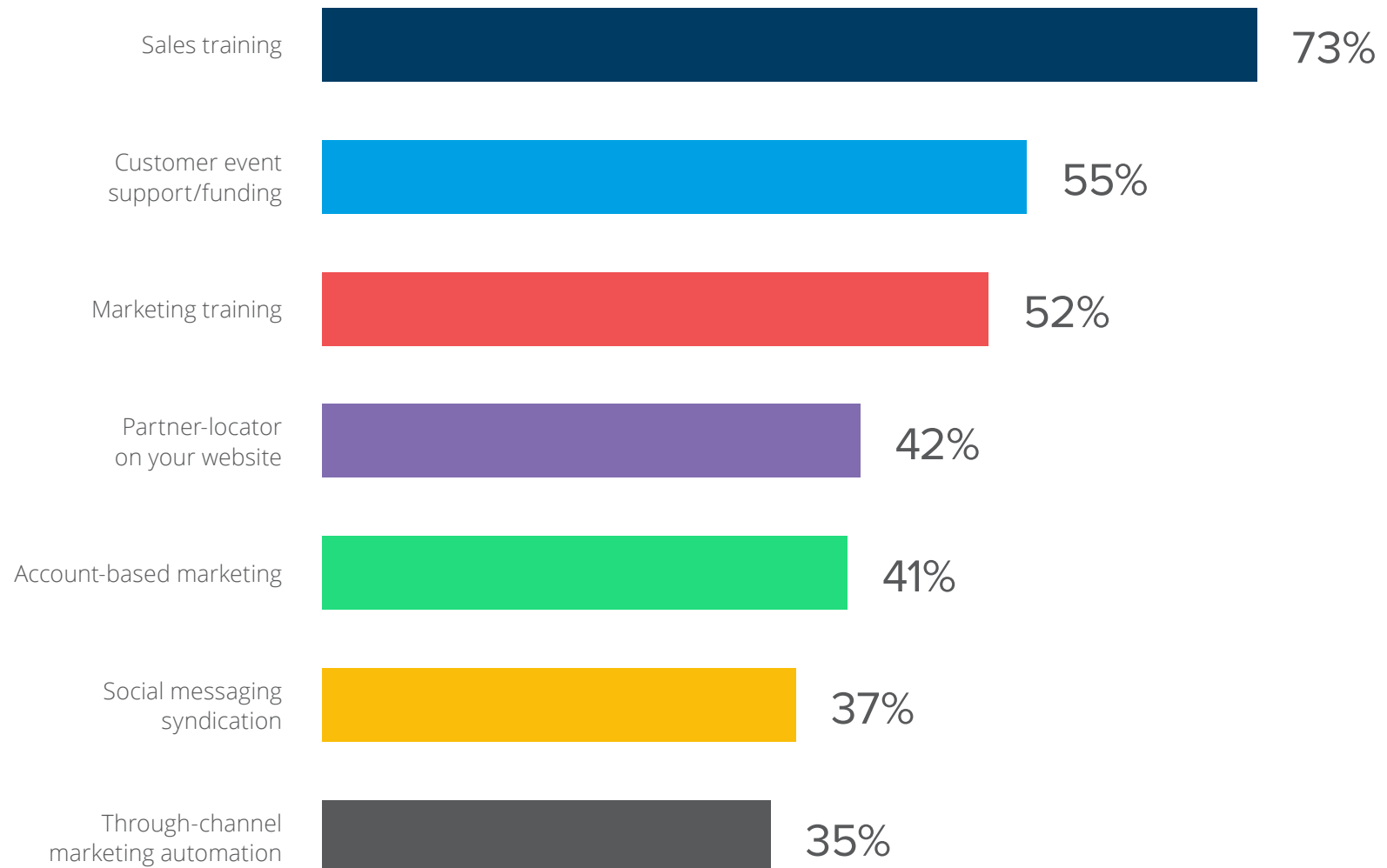
## CHANNEL MARKETING TRANSITIONED TO DIGITAL ACTIVITIES

B2B companies support a wide variety of partner marketing activities, some which reflect a transition to increasingly effective digital models and more modern practices. Somewhat surprisingly, account-based marketing is supported by more than 40% of the respondents. More than a third of the channel marketers offer assistance with through-channel marketing automation initiatives and social messaging syndication.

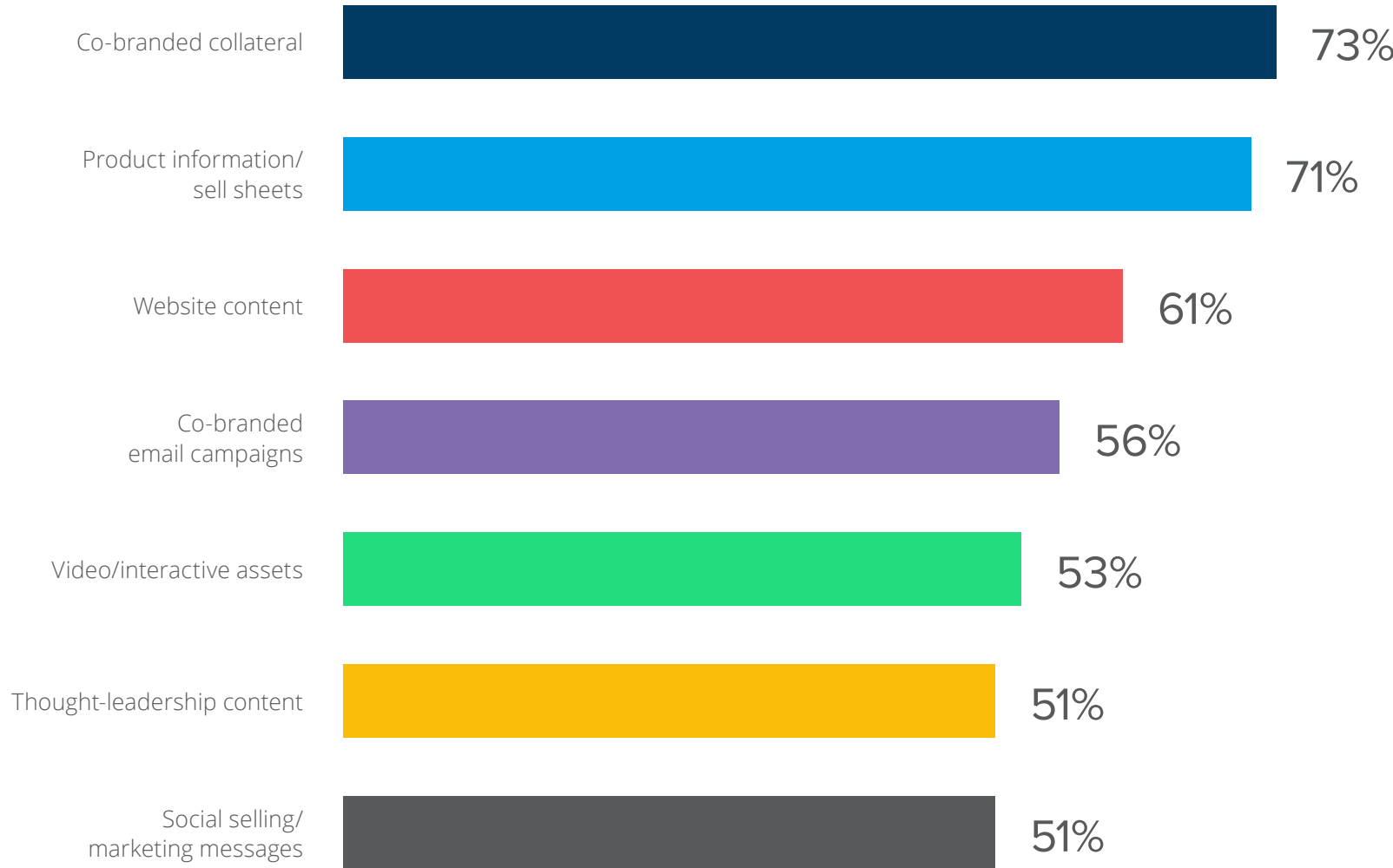
While support/funding for events is provided by more than half of the respondents, it's likely that figure would have been higher before the emergence of Covid-19.

Marketers offer a generous mix of materials to their partners. The materials generally reflect the preferences ranked by B2B buyers, as in the [2020 Content Preference Study](#). In that survey, the top response was placing a higher emphasis on the trustworthiness of the source. The survey also showed that B2B decision makers are not only engaging content for their own research but are increasingly sharing it with their networks via email and social channels, especially LinkedIn.

## Which of the following activities do you offer to support your channel partners?



# Which of the following marketing assets/materials do you provide to channel partners?

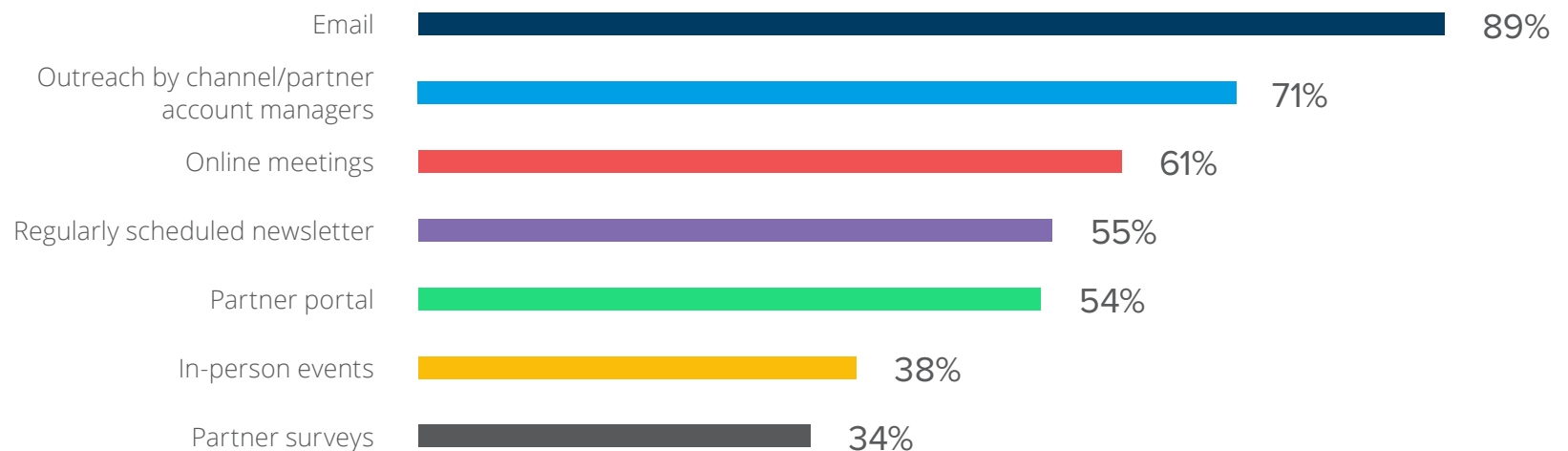




# EMAIL REIGNS BUT ONLINE MEETINGS GAIN TRACTION AS PARTNER COMMS TOOL

Channel teams use a variety of methods to stay in touch with their partner communities. In-person events were listed by nearly 40% of the survey respondents, a figure that was likely lower last year due to Covid-related restrictions. Online meetings were hosted by more than 60% of the channel leaders. Email was clearly the most widely used communication tool.

## Which of these channels of communication do you use to stay in touch with your channel partners?



# SUMMARY

B2B marketers are clearly making moves to ensure that their channel ecosystems will achieve prioritized goals in 2021. The majority of companies will expand the number of partners in the program. Many channel leaders aim to engage B2B customers at every stage of their buying journey by recruiting a wider variety of partners including referrers and influencers. But business executives know that just having more “feet-on-the-street” will not be sufficient to drive the revenue gains they expect. Channel leaders plan to make bigger investments in their technology stack to support their expanded and more diverse partner ecosystems.

## ABOUT THE SURVEY

*Channel Market Report* and *Demand Gen Report* surveyed 115 B2B marketers during the months of December 2020 and January 2021 from a variety of industries and company sizes to learn more about their channel programs and the investment they are making in them.

### JOB ROLE

24%	CEO
5%	COO
12%	CRO
15%	CMO
18%	VP Sales
10%	VP Channel Sales
6%	VP Channel Management
10%	Other

### INDUSTRY

54%	Software/technology
10%	Telecom
9%	Manufacturing
14%	Business services/consulting
1%	Financial services
3%	Healthcare
9%	Other

### COMPANY REVENUE

32%	Less than \$10 million
25%	\$10 million - \$50 million
8%	\$50 million to \$100 million
11%	\$100 million to \$500 million
8%	\$500 million to \$1 billion
16%	More than \$1 billion



[skellam@360insights.com](mailto:skellam@360insights.com)



360insights is a global channel technology provider offering its Channel Success Platform™, the first integrated software-as-a-service solution enabling brands to manage, measure and optimize consumer rebates, sales incentives (SPIFFs), volume incentives, MDF/CO-OP, sales allowances, points programs, and associated spending in one central location using data-driven channel insights, all underpinned with concierge support including program design and management, regulatory and compliance services, help desk, claims adjudication and payment services.

---



[sales@allbound.com](mailto:sales@allbound.com)



Allbound's software as a service (SaaS) PRM platform gives its customers and partners real-time access to sales enablement, marketing tools, and resources. Users can manage the partner life cycle from onboarding, training, enablement to pipeline management. Allbound's business intelligence (BI), called Channel Insights, gives customers a clear understanding on what's working across their channel or with a specific partner. Allbound provides automation of manual tasks in partner interactions, supporting partner competitiveness through insights. The most common use cases for Allbound's products include partner onboarding, content management, MDF management, partner sales automation, partner planning, and automated partner training.

---



[ignite@sparkyourchannel.com](mailto:ignite@sparkyourchannel.com)



Spark Your Channel™ is an innovative demand generation company that helps businesses, their Channel Partners, and their sales teams drive more revenue. The Spark™ through-channel marketing automation and sales enablement platform, which is built on 20 years experience in demand gen, sales enablement, and channel marketing, provides Partners and salespeople with automated personalized content, analytics and modern prospecting best practices.



*Channel Marketer Report* is an online publishing network for channel marketers and executives, with content focused on the latest solutions, trends and strategies to help vendors, resellers and distributors optimize marketing, both to and through partner networks. The CMR network is made up of a monthly e-newsletter, podcasts and video interviews, special reports, web seminars, and a content-rich web site.

[terry@channelmarketingreport.com](mailto:terry@channelmarketingreport.com)



*Demand Gen Report* is a targeted online publication that uncovers the strategies and solutions that help companies better align their sales and marketing organizations, and ultimately, drive growth. A key component of the publication's editorial coverage focuses on the sales and marketing automation tools that enable companies to better measure and manage their multi-channel demand generation efforts.

[info@demandgenreport.com](mailto:info@demandgenreport.com)



**Terry Moffatt** [in](#)

is a B2B journalist focused on sharing stories about forward-thinking professionals and how they enable their organizations to maximize opportunities and overcome challenges.