



# WHAT'S WORKING IN PARTNER MARKETING

Targeting Eager-To-Market Partners With Personalized Portals  
& Buyer-Centric Materials Boosts Channel Marketing ROI



## INTRODUCTION

The sweet spot for partner marketing is a smaller and faster moving target than ever before. As companies compete for the attention of better performing partners, they are striving to engage them with customized channel marketing programs. But to ensure that their marketing messages are broadcast through wider channel ecosystems as well, brands are also investing in campaign-amplifying tools, technologies and services.

Indeed, according to the second annual ***“Channel/Partner Marketing Benchmark Survey,”*** conducted by *Channel Marketer Report* and *Demand Gen Report*, 82% of the respondents said they will be adding to their roster of partners. To support those larger ecosystems, nearly 70% of those surveyed plan to boost their channel program budgets to upgrade a variety of solutions that support partner marketing, channel incentives and partner relationship management.

Working with the *right* partners, however, is critical to the success of channel marketing initiatives. “We are driving toward getting the right partners — those that raise their hands — and marrying their marketing skills with our expertise to take something amazing to market,” said Renee Ritter, Vice President of Channel, at [HelpSystems](#), a cybersecurity and automation software company. “Typically, if partners are putting that effort in, there will be results.”

Throughout this report, we’ll discuss emerging strategies for implementing effective partner marketing initiatives, including:

- Identifying and engaging partners more ready to participate in a vendor’s channel marketing program;
- Offering personalized partner portal experiences to speed access and usage of demand gen assets; and
- Expanding marketing materials and campaigns to support diverse partner priorities.

“If partners are putting effort in, there will be results.”

**RENEE RITTER, HELPSYSTEMS**



# USING DATA TO IDENTIFY & EMPOWER HIGHLY ENGAGED PARTNERS

While most partner programs are designed to cast out a massive net of partners to scoop up the greatest number of sales opportunities, channel marketers are being a little more precise about who they strive to engage and support. By focusing more attention on partners ready and/or demonstrably willing to participate in their marketing programs, channel marketers are maximizing their program's ROI.

This makes a lot of sense, considering that the most frequently encountered challenge when executing partner marketing programs was a lack of resources at the vendor and partner levels. Consequently, said Tendo Communications in a [report](#) on its recent survey of channel marketers, **"Vendor partner marketing teams with limited budgets and headcounts must make difficult, strategic choices about how to allocate resources."**

Channel leaders are employing a variety of tactics to better identify more eager co-marketing partners. For example, at [HelpSystems](#), a marketing certification program helps to identify and recognize partners that have made a greater commitment to understanding and utilizing the elements its channel marketing leaders support.

"The marketing certification is not something that is extremely difficult for someone in a marketing organization to pass," said Ritter. "But we want partners to understand the way that HelpSystems wants to help them from a marketing perspective."

A component of a four-prong approach to certifications that also includes sales, pre-sales and technical engineering, the marketing certification program helps partners become acclimated to the support that HelpSystems offers. Further, the components of the program, "help us make better recruiting decisions. When we do want to bring new partners on to fill a gap that we might have in a certain region or partner type, we can make that selection much more intelligently now based on the constructs of the program."



Laura Seymour, Senior Director of Global Partner Marketing & Operations at [Hewlett Packard Enterprises \(HPE\)](#), and her team are using data to selectively choose partners for specific campaigns. **“As a partner marketer, I’m always looking at how we can be smarter about doing things; how we can invest in a more strategic or more careful way, or more planned way, so that we can drive those better outcomes.”**

With the help of a third-party tool, HPE accesses data and insights that provide an independent assessment of its partners’ digital capabilities, plus their presence in the digital world. The scoring and methodology enables HPE to segment its partners based on their marketing capabilities.

The data “helps us determine what types of programs we might want to work with that partner and what type of investments from a market development funds perspective we might want to see that partner engage in,” said Seymour. “It gives us a good opportunity to maybe identify partners we want to invest more in from a digital perspective, so that we can increase our presence with that partner as well.”

“As a partner marketer, I’m always looking at how we can be smarter about doing things.”

**LAURA SEYMOUR, HPE**



# STREAMLINING THE PARTNER EXPERIENCE WITH CONTENT HUBS/PORTALS

Creating an exceptional partner experience is critical to engaging prioritized partners, as well as those who make up the long tail of an expansive channel ecosystem. Removing impediments that might limit any partners' participation in a channel marketing initiative is pushing many vendors to boost their investment in their channel technology stack. More than 40% of the respondents to the "Channel/Partner Marketing Benchmark Survey" will upgrade their partner portal this year. More than a quarter of them said they would make investments in through-channel marketing automation tools.

"Partner marketing is something that is becoming less of an art and more of a science," said Daniel Graff-Radford, CEO at [Allbound](#), a partner relationship management technology provider. "Knowing which partners successfully market for you is more important than ever and understanding which content resonates best with prospects is key. Through first party data, we recently learned that partner engagement, like sharing content and co-branding, leads to higher partner revenue and retention. The best partner programs make it easy for their partners to consume and re-share content."

At [Flexential](#), an IT service management company, a new portal was created to boost partner participation in its channel marketing initiative. "One of the key advantages of the new portal is it will allow us to offer more campaigns and partner co-marketing abilities as we continue to add new portal features/enhancements," said Melissa McCoy, VP of Channel Sales.

Flexential is striving to give partners the resources they need to help them with the entire lifecycle of the customer — demand creation through the close of the sale and beyond, said McCoy. "Providing them with marketing materials like email templates and 'campaigns in a box,' along with enablement programs including our new Hybrid IT certification program, is done in an effort to help partners throughout the buyer's journey."

[Lumen Technologies](#), an enterprise technology platform provider, hosts a new, customized and easy-to-navigate partner portal that provides partners with an

expanded menu of marketing capabilities, explained Dave Young, Lumen's Senior Vice President, Strategic Sales. "The portal provides partners with a variety of marketing automation tools and resources. They can create and download co-branded sales and marketing assets, launch white-glove email campaigns directly from the portal or with their own campaign tool and easily share Lumen social media content to their own social networks."

At **Code Corporation**, a global provider of barcode scanning and data capture technologies, a new partner portal is facilitating discovery of the company's marketing materials, identifying which documents are more successfully engaging prospects and making it easier for partners and co-brand and download them.

Emily Scales, Senior Channel Marketing Manager, commented that more partners are requesting materials to do their own marketing. "What we've seen a lot this year is social engagement. I've gotten requests on LinkedIn and other types of information because social marketing has been pretty successful this year."

Sharing resources in a process-streamlining system is, "a lot more helpful than sending them a bunch of links to review," said Scales.

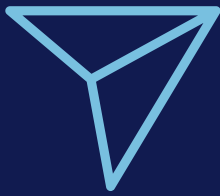


# KEEP THE CUSTOMERS IN MIND — REALLY!

According to the “Channel/Partner Marketing Benchmark Survey,” there is no shortage of the type of materials vendors are sharing with their partners. More than half of the respondents provide partners with:



**Thought leadership  
content**



**Social selling/marketing  
messages**



**Co-branded  
collateral**



**Website content**



**Video/interactive assets**



**Product information/  
sell sheets**

Brands, however, need to recognize that partners are increasingly resistant to sharing heavily branded or product-specific content that make up a large proportion of their materials. B2B buyers want to learn more about solutions that address the opportunities or challenges they face.

“Partners are focused on providing their customers with solutions, not a specific product or widget,” said Diane Krakora, a principal at [PartnerPath](#), a channel consulting firm. “The big shift that we’re seeing is more investment from the vendors around a marketing campaign for a solution, rather than always needing to have their logo on it.”



What may be more widely used by partners are assets co-created by multiple vendors to promote jointly developed business solutions, said Krakora. In addition to having many shared customers, technology brands often have many of the same partners in their channel ecosystems. Providing partners with marketing materials that build interest in their comprehensive business solutions is gaining traction with partners, she added.

Sharing marketing messages in a digital format is critical. When the pandemic struck in 2020, **Dell** immediately shifted its marketing spend more toward digital activities. Partners stepped up and took more advantage of the support provided by Dell, including MDF allocations.

“If you look back pre-pandemic, we were on a run rate with partners leveraging maybe 15% of their MDF resources,” said Cook. “Last fiscal year, we saw that pivot and grow up to 25%. We are just now in our fiscal Q3, so half our year is done and we’re already trending up above 30%. By the time it’s all said and done, we will, with the help of the partners’ efforts, have doubled the amount of digital marketing activity.”

Without a doubt, the shift to digital helped to contribute to Dell’s sales success these past many months. In August 2021, Dell reported its best second quarter in company history, with a 15% bump in revenue to \$26.1 billion.

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**DIANE KRAKORA, PARTNERPATH**



## CONCLUSION

Engaging ready-to-market partners with channel-friendly digital experiences is driving better outcomes for channel marketing programs. Rather than striving to get a larger percentage of their partners to participate in their demand generation programs, channel marketers are instead identifying those partners who are ready and eager to take full advantage of the marketing support being extended to them.

To ensure they meet the expectations of partners committed to going to market with them, channel marketers are crafting materials with buyer-centric messages offered in modern digital formats. To facilitate partner access to all marketing assets and use of them, channel teams are investing in partner portals and channel marketing automation platforms that result in reliable partner adoption.



*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.

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*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 multichannel demand generation efforts.

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