

MASTER THE ART OF TO-CHANNEL MARKETING

ENGAGE AND EMPOWER CHANNEL PARTNERS

Deliver information To-Partners when, where, and how they want it.



Heather K. Margolis, Founder and CEO

COMMUNICATION IN TODAY'S WORLD

Business communications are no longer static and one-way. We share information via multiple platforms and expect concise and relevant information at our fingertips instantly.

In today's noisy digital landscape, easy communication is crucial for successful Vendor-Partner relationships.

Partners are inundated with information.

Today's Partners typically work with 5–25 Vendors at any given time. The constant flow of information coming in from these Vendors can be disruptive, overwhelming, and even frustrating at times. Vendors who understand how to make communication easier and more enjoyable for Partners are the ones winning Partner mindshare.



THE CHALLENGE WITH COMMUNICATIONS

The challenge most Vendors face is filtering information by Partner needs, using the correct delivery method, and consolidating important information from varied sources within your organization.

Start with the following questions:

1.

How do you reach Partners consistently, efficiently and personally at multiple levels?



2.

How do you avoid being drowned out by the massive amount of information hitting Partner inboxes?



3.

How do you know what information is relevant to which Partners and how they want to receive it?



CASE STUDY #1:

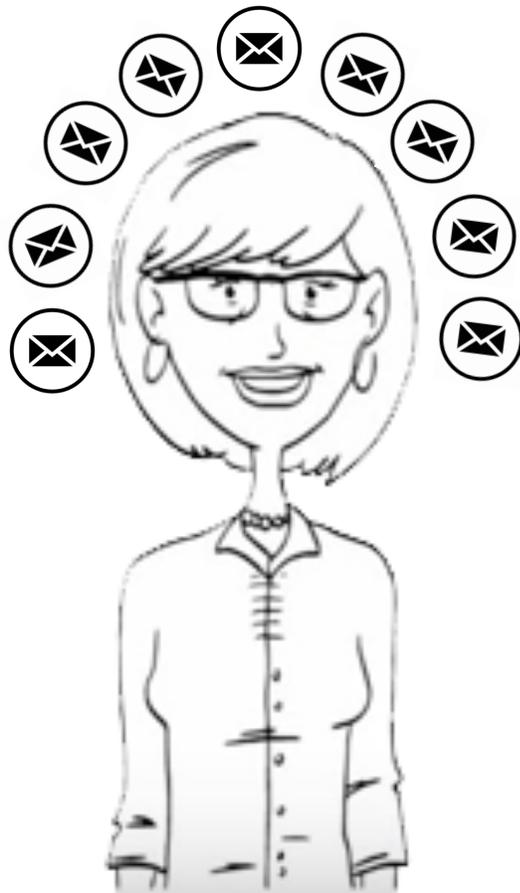
Does this sound familiar?

Jen is the Sales Director at Value Added Reseller who works with HPE, VMware, Dell EMC, Splunk, and Cisco, plus a few other developing relationships as business grows.

Her inbox receives several hundred emails daily from her Vendors, sales team, and customers. Jen has given up trying to stay on top of it and instead only responds to the most timely and relevant to her pipeline.

Working with five Vendors, Jen feels like she receives enough email to hire someone just to sift through it.

Relationships with each Vendor span sales, marketing, product, programs, and support, making it difficult to stay current with updates and information. Jen knows Vendor information is important to selling joint solutions. She just wishes it could be easier to digest or come in a different format so nothing gets missed!



TIME FOR A REALITY CHECK!

1. Admit you're on the email train. The truth is, email is not always the preferred or most effective communication platform. True, it gives us the ability to quickly communicate across locations and time zones, but it also makes us lazy in how we reach out to Partners.

2. The more information you send, the more they tune out. Different Partner types and various roles within Partner organizations want their communications in different ways. When bombarded, they shut down and your important messages may be missed or ignored. Think about this: were the four webinar reminders you sent this week really worth Partners prematurely deleting an email about your new automation tool?

“Partners are not consistent in how they prefer to be communicated with and realistically it takes multiple vehicles to cut through the noise.”

You need a strategy to figure out what information your Partners need and want. Only then can you determine how to consistently connect with them on their terms.

Let's explore:

Four steps to a Partner Communication Plan that won't bombard Partners:

- ✓ Learn how Partners want to communicate with you
- ✓ Define your audience
- ✓ Recruit your field to be a megaphone
- ✓ Reinvent your communications plan



1.

Learn how Partners want to communicate with you

“ *New ways to communicate are not replacements for existing methods, like email. If you trade one for the other, you'll lose impact and stunt possibilities for reaching your Partners.* ”

- Heather K. Margolis

Learn how Partners want to communicate with you

During an early social media workshop, someone asked, “With all these new communication tools, which can I take off my plate now?” Unfortunately, the answer is none.

New ways to communicate are not replacements for existing methods, like email. If you trade one for the other, you'll lose impact and stunt possibilities for reaching your Partners.

Some Partners prefer email. Others pay more attention to LinkedIn Group updates. Some need more personal communication such as a text or a call and yes, some DO want your emails. Keep in mind repetition works in your favor. While some might not open your email initially, a LinkedIn group discussion or text message may remind them to go back and read it.

The good news is that Partners are tuned into you and want your information. Your job is to package it in ways that reach them.



CASE STUDY #2:

Start at the source



After years of seeing email open rates dwindle, David, a Channel Marketing Manager at Commalot Technologies, decided to figure out how Partners want to receive information.

He sent out a simple survey asking the company type, individual's role, which information they wanted to receive, and where/when to receive it. David used a PRM system to segment his list and establish governance on communications.

The governance made it clear to his internal teams what information went to which Partners, to whom within that company, and by which method (email, newsletter, social). Today, David's open rates are higher and his click-through rate on social drives more engagement than ever.



2.

Define your audience

“ When communication issues surface, it is easy to defend your current methods without taking a deeper look at what’s really happening. ”

- *Heather K. Margolis*

Define your audience

A Vendor remarked, “I sat in a Partner meeting with our field where the Partner asked for more marketing education programs. We had just completed a 12-part video series on that exact topic. The Partner had no knowledge of them.”

When communication issues surface, it is easy to defend your current methods without taking a deeper look at what’s really happening.

Without a plan you won’t know if you hit the mark.

While you may not be able to cater every piece of content to every person’s preferences (yet!), there are better ways to share and connect with your Partners.

Start by taking action to gather information:

- ✓ Survey Partners to better understand how, when, and where they want which type of information.
- ✓ Clean up your contact list (I know, I know, painful right?) to ensure the right people receive the right content.
- ✓ Call select Partners to get their feedback and thoughtful responses.
- ✓ Aggregate and analyze findings and integrate them into a new communications strategy.

CASE STUDY #3:

Plan to impact multiple Partners

A few months ago, the Channel Support group at Software, Inc. surveyed their Partner community about communication types and desires.

Leah, Channel Support Director, sees the benefit of knowing what Partners want from the communication plan for a recent feature-set deployment. She worked with Channel Marketing to ensure the messaging was clear and concise. Software Inc. has over fifty Partners and includes updates in a monthly Partner newsletter and via social on LinkedIn and Twitter.

Additionally, Leah made sure the field team was aware and provided sharing options for social, email, and phone talking points, to help them pass along the information to the right Partners and ensure it's coming from someone they know. This is the most buzz Leah has seen on a launch during her time at Software, Inc.



3.

Recruit your field to be a megaphone

“ Your Channel Account Managers, Field Marketing Managers, and Channel Sales teams are talking to Partners regularly. Utilize these resources for communicating to Partners. ”

- Heather K. Margolis

Recruit your field to be a megaphone

Your Channel Account Managers, Field Marketing Managers, and Channel Sales teams are talking to Partners regularly. Not through mass email, but rather via face-to-face, phone, and text. Having rapport with your Partners, they can and should relay any and all communications, acting as your megaphone. There are benefits for all parties involved:

Partners listen when the field contacts them because they have a relationship.

Your field can match your communications to various Partners and to specific individuals at each Partner. As your field pays more attention to communications types, they'll gain a better understanding of all the resources available to Partners.



4.

Reinvent your communications plan

“ A few well-thought-out actions will help your communications plan be streamlined, engaging, and gain Partner respect. ”

- *Heather K. Margolis*



Reinvent your communications plan

Your business is their business, and their customers are your customers; it's why we call them "Partners."
Therefore all interactions and communications should promote mutual success.

Keep multiple communication channels open and full of valuable and easily accessible information. Partners will appreciate it.

Channel marketing doesn't have to be overwhelming, especially since Partners want Vendors to make their business lives easier. By focusing on ease of doing business, you set Partners up for success. A few well-thought-out actions will help your communications plan be streamlined, engaging, and gain Partner respect.



ACTION #1

Consolidate announcements into regularly scheduled newsletters.

- ✓ Consolidation is easier for Partners to digest and avoids repetition.
- ✓ Archive newsletters on your portal to ensure Partners have access to the information at all times.

ACTION #2

Be active on social.

- ✓ Ensure Partners follow your social media accounts and actively engage with them there.

Engagement is a key factor in social media algorithms. It's not enough to push content. Without engagement your followers (Partners) won't see your posts.

Engaging on social does two things: it keeps you top-of-mind with Partners and creates exposure for your Partners. It also ensures that when you have an announcement, they'll tune in.



ACTION #3

Start a group.

LinkedIn groups are a great place to share information with Partners and to start conversations that seed Partners with ideas for selling more of your products and solutions.

- ✓ Groups can be made private so Vendors maintain control of who has access to Partner-facing information.

ACTION #4

Email is alive and well but needs direction.

- ✓ Emails from Vendors need to be well coordinated, customized for Partners, and align with their interests and needs.
- ✓ They also need to be short and to the point so when Partners receive them, they know it will be a quick and painless read.

This may take some internal communication between groups to make it most effective, but will create efficiencies over time.

ACTION #5

Subject lines matter more than you think.

If email is the vehicle, the subject line is the gas. Nothing can motivate a Partner to open your email more than the subject line.

✓ Be concise, direct, and descriptive.

ACTION #6

There's an app for that.

Slack and other collaboration apps were designed with businesses in mind, but the popularity has spread to groups where participants aren't necessarily working together. Think: tech meetups.

- ✓ If your Partners already use Slack, it's easy to set up an invitation-only Slack channel used for communicating important information in a place where Partners are already engaged.

ACTION #7

Change your tone to show value.

The goal of the Channel is no longer selling a single product; it's about delivering an outcome and Partners acting as trusted advisors. It's also no longer about Vendors calling the shots.

- ✓ Partners are in the driver's seat and they want to work with Vendors who are aligned with and respect their business goals.

ACTION #8

Always be helping.

All Vendor communications should come from the “Partner, what can we do for you?” point of view.

- ✓ What are their customers trying to accomplish and how can you help them?
- ✓ What solutions can you help them develop?
- ✓ What’s the best marketing plan you can co-create and where do you fit in?
- ✓ What are their goals and how can you support them in realizing those goals?



ACTION #9

Consider your Channel Partners' perspectives.

It's not simply about getting Partners to watch your video or join your webinar, is it? It's about sharing what's in it for them.

Communicate the benefits of your program, incentives, or how this webinar will improve their bottom line. That is what engages Partners and delivers good outcomes.



A FINAL WORD...

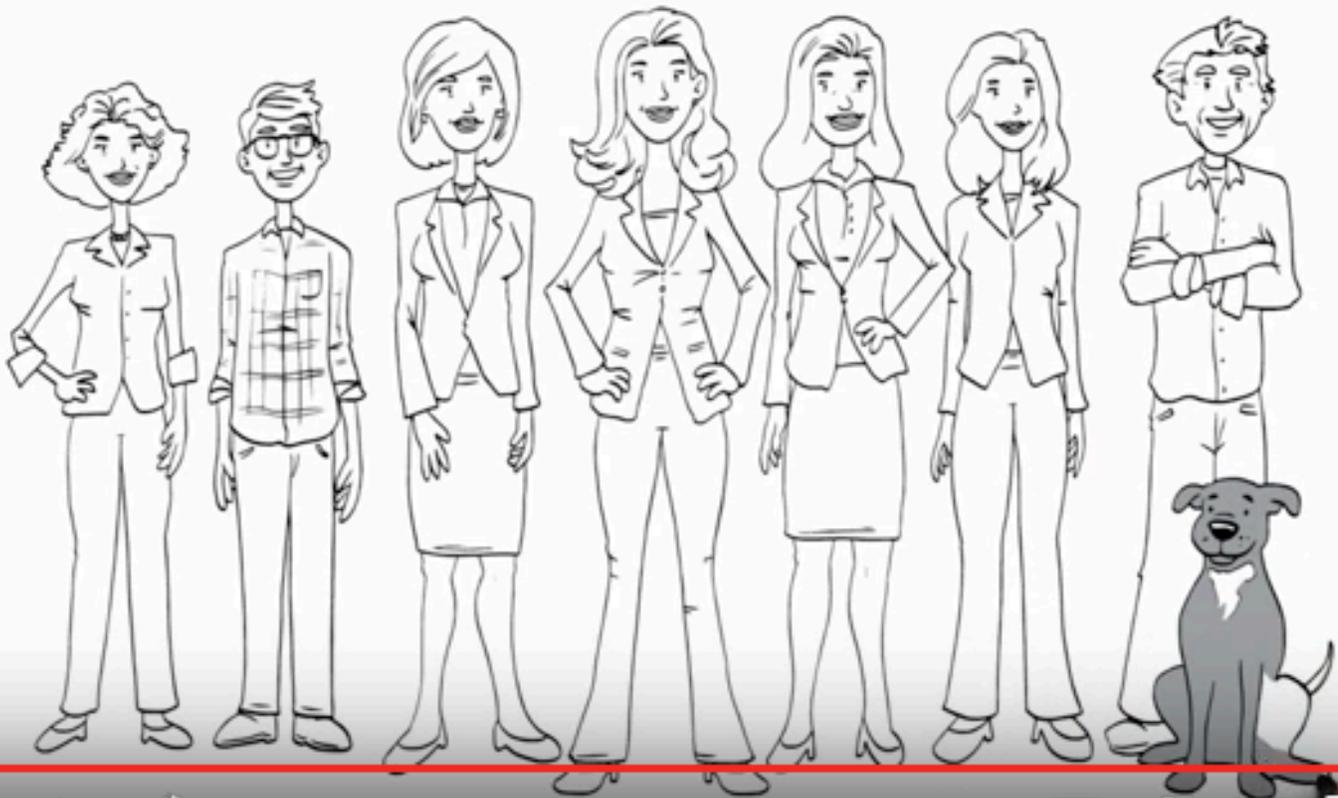
To keep information relevant and top of mind with Partners,
embrace this mantra:

Relevant. Consistent. And Direct.



Need help improving your Partner Communications?

[Contact Us!](#)



We Help YOU Drive More Business Through The Channel:

Watch to learn how!



ABOUT CHANNEL MAVEN CONSULTING:

Need help improving your Partner communications? We're here to help!

Get expert advice on how to customize and streamline your communications playbook.

Contact us for a complimentary review of your Partner communications.

Channel Maven Consulting provided this eBook. If you find it valuable, please share it often.

We provide strategic and tactical consulting services for engaging communications and best practices in today's digital landscape for IT and Telecom Vendors of all sizes.

We'd love to hear your comments, feedback, and questions.

Email: Heather K. Margolis, Founder and CEO
heather@channelmavenconsulting.com

Connect with us online:
<http://channelmavenconsulting.com>

