

Driving growth through the channel

The secrets to successful through-channel marketing



Unleash the potential of your greatest go-to-market asset

Driving demand through partner channels is critical to vendor success. Yet not all have discovered the recipe for effective through-channel marketing.

Through-channel marketing has become a hot topic in the technology sector in recent years. Vendors and service providers are increasingly focused on how they can engage their channel partners in their marketing programmes, and unlock the channel's potential as a demand generation engine.

Despite the increased focus, many companies are still finding their way in this area, experimenting with different approaches to find what works and what doesn't. As a result, not all through-channel initiatives are well designed or well executed.

While many vendors are still on a learning curve, other more advanced competitors are stealing a march – using effective through-channel marketing techniques to win customers and grow market share.

At OneGTM we specialise in helping vendors and service providers build successful through-channel marketing programmes. We've pulled together this guide based on our experiences and what we regard as best practice.

The days when vendors stimulated demand and resellers fulfilled it are long gone. Through-channel marketing has become increasingly vital as a way to drive business growth.

In this eGuide we look at:

- ✓ Why through-channel marketing has become more important.
- ✓ The common issues that prevent through-channel marketing initiatives from achieving their goals
- ✓ Our tips for delivering successful through-channel programmes



The growing importance of through-channel marketing

As change impacts every aspect of B2B channel marketing, it is not surprising that vendors have been re-thinking their go-to-market approach.



Technology is transforming, buyer behaviours are modifying, new channel business models are emerging, and marketing techniques are evolving rapidly. In this changing landscape, through-channel marketing has become increasingly vital to drive business growth. There are a number of factors driving this evolution.



Sector and client knowledge is key

Customers are increasingly resistant to generic, product-led messaging. Channel partners therefore need to engage them by bringing the customer and market knowledge that can translate generic vendor campaigns into something more relevant and compelling for individual customers.



Limitations of partner resources

Many channel partners lack the resources, platforms and expertise to use modern marketing techniques to create and execute effective integrated campaigns. This creates an opportunity for many vendors with resources and economies of scale to invest in the marketing assets and tools needed.



Solutions over products

As enterprise IT complexity increases, customers are no longer happy to buy discrete technology products and then work out how to deploy, integrate and manage them. They want integrated solutions delivered as a fully managed service, which leads many channel partners to having a great influence over technology purchasing decisions.



Smarter go-to-market approach

In today's market, where senior decision-makers are difficult to reach by phone and ignore unsolicited emails, generating demand requires a more sophisticated approach. This relies on integrated inbound and outbound tactics, insightful content, and effective use of marketing automation technology.



Competitive vendor landscape

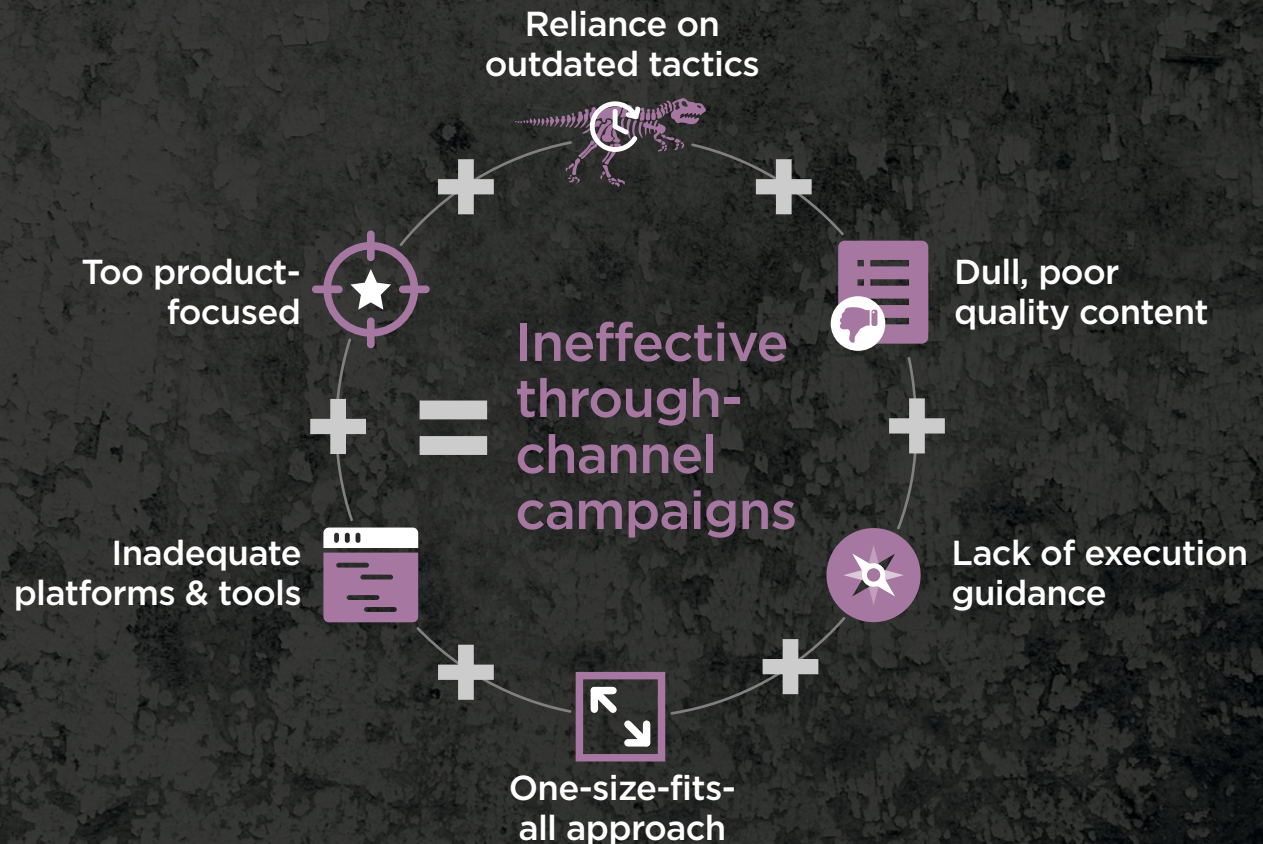
Many vendors struggle to achieve genuine product differentiation in highly competitive markets. Getting channel engagement and mindshare can make the difference between success or failure. In this environment, the level of marketing support offered by vendors can be critical to business success.

Yesterday's approaches mean today's failures

Techniques that may have worked in the past, are no longer effective at driving effective through-channel campaigns.

In times past, putting together a campaign for the channel probably consisted of not much more than cobbling together some email copy, a call out script and some product collateral, and shipping it out to partners with a covering note reminding them how great your product is. That approach just won't work today (if it ever did).

On the next page we look at the common pitfalls of through-channel marketing.



Causes of ineffective through-channel campaigns

We see a number of common pitfalls with vendors' attempts to market through their channel, which are preventing them realising their growth potential.



Too product-focused

A perennial problem is the tendency for vendors to focus too heavily on their product and not enough on business issues and customer value. In today's environment, well-informed decision-makers don't want to talk to suppliers about technologies and products until they're some way down their buying journey.



Dull, poor-quality content

Distinctive, engaging, insightful content, which addresses customers' key concerns, is at the heart of most successful campaigns today. However, we still see too much dry, long-form content that is very unlikely to capture anyone's interest – or content that purports to be insightful but instead is just a re-hash of what everyone else is saying.



One-size-fits-all approach

Channel businesses today are a diverse community, with different business models, resources, market focus and capabilities. Vendors' approach to through-channel marketing doesn't always reflect this diversity. A one-size-fits-all approach, which doesn't allow flexibility in how a campaign is executed, is unlikely to attract broad take-up.



Reliance on outdated tactics

Many vendor campaigns for the channel still rely too heavily on standalone outbound tactics (e.g. email blasts or call-out days). However, they are seldom effective unless they're delivered as part of a broader campaign and used at the appropriate points in the customers' buying journey – for instance a follow up on a website download.



Inadequate platforms and tools

Content assets on their own aren't much good if you lack the tools to do anything useful with them and execute the campaign effectively. If your partners don't have sophisticated, in-house marketing operations, then failure to support them with the right tools and platforms will undermine the success of your campaign.



Lack of execution guidance

A lack of in-house marketing expertise means many vendors fail to effectively brief partners on the campaigns they're expected to support them in. By not understanding the target audience, campaign strategy, buyer journeys and how different tools should be used as part of an integrated campaign, partners are unlikely to execute successfully.

The principles of successful through-channel marketing

Doing through-channel marketing well can be hard, but it's also not unknowable sorcery. Applying best practice, and a structured approach, can make a big difference to the success of your initiatives. Here are our eight key principles:



Clear 'to partner' message



Integrated campaign frameworks



Insightful, impactful content



Flexible tools and platforms



Marketing-as-a-Service support



Effective campaign enablement



Alignment with vendor programmes



Good governance

PRINCIPLES OF THROUGH-CHANNEL SUCCESS



Clear 'to partner' message

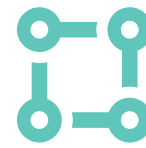
Explain how you can boost your partner's business to help convince them of your value.

Let's start with the basics.

Before you can hope to interest a partner in your through-channel campaigns, they need to be convinced about the value of working with you as a vendor. So, alongside any 'through partner' activity, you need to make sure your 'to partner' message is clearly articulated and effectively communicated.

That 'to partner' message needs to cover a number of bases, including the market opportunity that exists for the partner, how you'll help them unlock the opportunity, and how working with you will help them achieve their business goals.

You need to make sure your 'to partner' message is clearly articulated and effectively communicated.



Integrated campaign frameworks

Keep track of how various marketing tactics could be used to generate desired results.

In today's market, any successful campaign relies on the effective use of multiple marketing tactics.

Without that blended approach, it's very difficult to capture the interest of prospective buyers and then build engagement throughout their buying journey.

When building campaigns for execution by channel partners, vendors need to think about the appropriate mix of tactics, and how they will be used in combination to generate the desired results. Partners then need to be provided not just with the various assets, but also a framework for how those assets fit together as part of an integrated campaign.



Example campaign project plans and illustrative customer journeys will help partners understand how the different elements of the campaign fit together.



Insightful, impactful content

Unique insights and a distinctive point of view are the basis of most great content.

To open up new conversations with prospective customers, your partners will need content which is highly relevant to those customers' concerns and tells them something they don't already know.

Unique insights and a distinctive point of view are the basis of most great content – enabling you and your partners to demonstrate a genuine understanding of your customers' challenges, and offer relevant advice and opinions about what they should do about them.

To sustain engagement through a buying journey, you also need to provide a range of assets in different formats, that explore issues at different levels of depth. In the early stages of a buying journey, you'll need easily digestible content, such as video and infographics. But then to build customer engagement, you'll need more in-depth content, such as eGuides and webinars. Given that many channel partners lack the resources and expertise to create high-quality content, this is an area where vendors can really add value.

3x One survey found that per dollar spent, content marketing produces 3 times more leads than paid search.¹



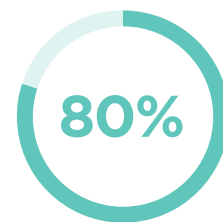
Flexible tools and platforms

Give partners access to campaign delivery tools, while retaining control over key elements.

Smart marketing in today's world is increasingly technology-enabled, whether it's effectively tracking emails, remarketing to website visitors, or scoring leads for telemarketing follow-ups.

However, it's not feasible for many channel partners to invest in leading-edge marketing platforms, so vendors are increasingly investing in Through-Channel Marketing Automation (TCMA) platforms. TCMA platforms enable vendors to give partners access to the tools they need to deliver campaigns, while still retaining control over elements such as branding and core messages.

Flexibility of approach is key. The marketing sophistication of different partners will vary greatly; some will have their own in-house platforms, others won't. Therefore, it's important that content and tools are provided in a way that allows each partner a degree of flexibility in how they adapt the message and how they execute the campaign.



One study reported that 80% of marketing automation users saw their number of leads increase, and 77% saw the number of conversions increase.²



Marketing-as-a-service support

Offering marketing-as-a-service support can greatly increase campaign take-up and effectiveness.

We've spoken of the importance of an integrated approach to executing campaigns, but also about the fact that many channel partners have limited in-house resources.

So, offering your partners marketing-as-a-service support can greatly increase both the take-up of your campaigns and their effectiveness. With a marketing-as-a-service model, partners can draw on external support to help execute the campaign, filling in the gaps in their own capability. That external support may be provided by the vendor's in-house teams, or more likely by a third-party agency appointed by the vendor, such as OneGTM.



Zift has shown that channel partners with access to Managed Services benefit from 93% more new leads, 33% more active hot leads and 27% more hot leads.³



Effective campaign enablement

Providing partners with the right guidance is vital if your campaigns are to achieve the desired results.

It's no good having great campaigns if your partners' marketing teams don't understand the strategy and don't know how they're supposed to use the tools. Likewise, if their sales teams don't understand the key messages, or how to develop the conversation to convert interest into a sale.

Effective enablement is vital as part of any campaign roll-out, and it needs to address multiple audiences – the senior execs who'll decide whether to adopt the campaign, the marketing people who'll be responsible for the execution and the salespeople who'll be expected to follow up on opportunities. As part of your campaign launch, you need to ensure you provide the right materials (e.g. campaign briefings, sales playbooks) and also deliver the right activities (e.g. webinars, 1-2-1 briefings) to ensure that these key messages get across.

Effective enablement is a vital part of any campaign roll-out.

Alignment with vendor programmes

Help partners to leverage your broader marketing investments.

The impact of any through-channel activity will be maximised if it is well aligned with the vendor's own marketing programmes.

If the themes and issues that partner marketing activity is focused on are the same as the ones that the vendor is talking about through advertising, PR, events etc, then the impact of those messages will be far greater. It means that partners will be leveraging any awareness that the vendor has created in the market, rather than having to start from scratch with each prospective partner.

As part of designing campaigns, vendors also need to think about which elements should be executed by partners and which it makes more sense for the vendor to manage centrally. For example, if you've got multiple partners in the same territory it doesn't make sense for them to all be fighting over the same keywords for PPC. That activity might be better driven by the vendor with leads or traffic distributed to participating partners.

Consider which elements should be partner-led and which could be centrally managed.

Good governance

How will you ensure that partners are putting in the right effort to maximise the return on your investment?

Through-channel marketing programmes need to be supported by an effective governance framework.

For example, it's important to establish ground rules for which partners have access to the campaign and what commitment you want from them in return. You don't want to dilute the effectiveness of the campaign by oversaturating the market. You also want to ensure that partners are putting in the right effort to maximise the return on your investment.

Reporting from partners against an agreed set of campaign metrics is key to ensure you capture learnings about what does and doesn't work, enabling you to optimise the campaign as you go forward. Capturing results will also enable you to justify further investment in follow-up campaigns.

Another consideration is how your MDF/Co-op funding programmes are managed. If you've invested in creating campaigns for partners to use, ensure that MDF is used to help them execute those campaigns.

Reporting from partners and capturing results are both key for future campaigns.

Helping you achieve through-channel marketing success

Tap into our expertise and experience to help power your business growth.

OneGTM specialises in designing and executing effective go-to-market programmes for technology vendors and service providers.

We've worked with many market leaders to help build successful through-channel marketing programmes. Our services include creating through-channel marketing frameworks, developing integrated, insight-led campaigns, building channel enablement assets, and providing execution support to partners.

To discuss how we could help you build a successful through-channel marketing programme, please **contact us:**

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References:

- 1 Kapost, Content Marketing ROI, Jun 2012
- 2 VB Insight "Marketing Automation, how to make the right buying decision" (2015)
- 3 Zift Solutions: How Suppliers Can Maximize Channel Success With Managed Services [Infographic]. Jan 2014.