



eGUIDE

DRIVING GROWTH THROUGH THE CHANNEL

The secrets to successful through-channel marketing



INTRODUCTION

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

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 in their marketing programmes and unlock the channel's potential as a demand-generation engine.

Despite this increased focus however, 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.

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 of what works, and what can get in the way.

WITHIN THE GUIDE WE LOOK AT:

- + Why through-channel marketing has increased in importance
- + The common issues that prevent through-channel marketing initiatives achieving their goals
- + Our tips for delivering successful through-channel programmes

SECTION 1

The growing importance of through-channel marketing

Every aspect of B2B technology channel marketing has been impacted by dramatic changes. Technology has been transformed with the shift to the cloud to the growing importance of IoT, AI and analytics. The channel has transitioned to new business models and customer propositions, and the discipline of marketing itself has changed radically. As firms seek to engage hard-to-reach decision-makers, content- and data-driven approaches have come to the fore.

So it's not surprising that technology vendors and service providers have been re-thinking their go-to-market approach. 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.

There are several factors driving this change:



SHIFTS IN INFLUENCE

As enterprise IT complexity has increased, customers have become less inclined to buy discrete technology products and have the hassle of deploying, integrating and managing them. They increasingly want to buy integrated solutions, and have them delivered as a managed service. Over half of SMBs now use an MSP¹ and 54% of channel partners now see managed services as the greatest opportunity for their business.²

At the same time, enterprises are responding to changing needs by shifting workloads and data to, and between, multiple cloud platforms, creating an additional level of complexity to be managed. They need partners with the specialist expertise and services to help them plan, transition to, and manage highly distributed, hybrid infrastructures. According to Canalys there is 'a huge demand for channel partners to provide consulting, migration, integration and management services across multiple [cloud] platforms'.³



Over half of SMBs now use an MSP

As a result of these changes, the influence of individual vendor and product brands is declining, and solutions- and services-focused channel partners are exerting a greater influence over technology purchasing decisions.



THE IMPORTANCE OF SECTOR AND CUSTOMER KNOWLEDGE

Customers are ever more resistant to product-led messaging that emphasises technology features and generic benefits. To engage them, particularly in the early stages of their buying journey, it's necessary to talk about the issues that are specific to their sector, department, job role or individual business. 66% of B2B buyers said it was very important that a solution provider's website spoke directly to the needs of their industry and the provider showed expertise in their area.⁴

Channel partners usually bring a level of customer intimacy and specialist market knowledge that vendors can't match. Those partners often have a vital role to play in translating generic vendor content and campaigns into something more relevant and compelling for individual customers.

One McKinsey study of **mobile SaaS providers** found that companies with **vertically-oriented value propositions** were **9x more likely** to achieve **annual contract values** of **more** than **\$100,000 per customer** compared to those that had a **horizontal focus**.⁵





SMARTER APPROACHES REQUIRED

With buyers resistant to unsolicited communications, and GDPR imposing new restrictions, generating demand requires a more sophisticated approach than email blasts or cold-calling.

Successful marketing relies on an integrated mix of inbound and outbound tactics, effective use of marketing automation technology and insightful content. Recent research shows that 68% of B2B buyers prefer to research on their own and 65% have consumed at least 3 pieces of content before engaging a salesperson.⁶

But many channel partners lack the resources, platforms and marketing expertise to develop insightful content and execute effective integrated campaigns. This creates an opportunity for vendors, who have the resources and economies of scale that enable investment in the marketing assets and tools that partners need.



82%

of the most successful B2B
companies were identified
as having a sophisticated
approach to content marketing⁷



8 out of 10

how partners rated the importance of
programs to their vendor relationships⁸



COMPETITIVE VENDOR LANDSCAPE

Many vendors and service providers operate in highly competitive markets, where they struggle to achieve genuine product differentiation. However, one area they can differentiate is in the level of go-to-market support they provide to their channel partners. The public cloud providers, for example, have all been working hard in recent years to build up their channel programmes as they fight for market share.

In today's environment, where channel businesses are struggling to keep pace with changes in the marketing landscape, the level of support offered by vendors can be a critical factor influencing who channel partners decide to focus on. Getting channel engagement and mindshare can be the difference between success or failure.

IN SUMMARY

As a result of these and other changes, marketing through the channel has become a critical area of focus for vendors and service providers – no longer a nice-to-have, but an essential element in their channel strategies.

SECTION 2

Yesterday's approaches mean today's failures

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).

Although most vendors are getting more sophisticated in their channel marketing approach there are still a number of common failings that we see.

TOO PRODUCT-FOCUSED

Surprising as it may seem, some vendors still focus too heavily on pushing their product and not enough on business issues and customer value. Decision-makers don't want to talk to suppliers about technologies and products until they're some way down their buying journey. 96% of B2B buyers say that vendors should improve the quality of their content by curbing sales messages.⁹

Content explaining why your product is faster/bigger/cheaper/simpler than the competition no longer stimulates demand (unless you're in a very hot market). Campaigns which lead with product also turn off channel partners, because it allows less space for them to build in their own value.

RELIANCE ON OUTDATED TACTICS

Some vendor campaigns still rely too heavily on isolated outbound tactics, such as email blasts or call-out days, and don't provide enough support for social and online activity.

Traditional tactics still have a role to play, however in today's B2B technology market 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 example to promote relevant content or to drive registrations for a webinar.



DULL, POOR-QUALITY CONTENT

Distinctive, engaging and insightful content – speaking to the issues that customers care about – is at the heart of most successful campaigns today. Yet, some of the content pushed out by vendors falls far short.

One common failing is content which purports to be insightful, but is just a re-hash of what every other analyst or vendor is saying. ‘Revealing’ that digital disruption is a significant trend, or that businesses are moving their IT to the cloud, won’t have customers clamouring to hear more of your ‘insights’. Another issue is too much reliance on dry, unengaging, long-form content. While there’s a place for substantive content at key stages in the buying journey, a heavy, 30-page technical white paper is rarely what prompts an initial engagement.



INADEQUATE PLATFORMS AND TOOLS

Content assets on their own aren’t much good if you lack the tools to do anything useful with them. A great campaign idea will fail to generate results if your channel partners don’t have the right tools to execute the campaign effectively.

If your partners are all large SIs and Service Providers with sophisticated, in-house marketing operations then it may be that all they require is the raw content, which they can then repurpose for their own use. However, if your channel partners are predominantly smaller organisations then a failure to support them with the right tools and platforms will undermine the success of your campaign. Forrester research identified lack of automation as one of the top three challenges faced by channel partners in executing brand marketing activities.¹⁰



ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL APPROACH

Channel businesses today are a diverse community, with different business models, resources, market focus, propositions and capabilities. Some partners will have rich, well-maintained prospect databases they can use for email marketing, others won’t. Some will have a significant social media audience, others won’t. Some will want to adapt messaging to reflect their own value-add, others won’t.

Vendors’ approach to through-channel marketing needs to reflect this diversity. A one-size-fits-all approach, which doesn’t allow flexibility in how a campaign is executed, is unlikely to get broad take-up.



LACK OF EXECUTION GUIDANCE

As we’ve said, many smaller channel partners lack in-house marketing expertise. Their marketing resources – if they have any – may be fairly junior. Therefore, just sending partners a bunch of content assets without any guidance on how to use them probably won’t produce the best results.

If partners don’t understand the target audience, the campaign strategy, the buyer journeys and how the different tools should be used as part of an integrated campaign, then they’re unlikely to execute successfully.



MAKING IT TOO DARN’ DIFFICULT

Most channel businesses operate with lean teams who are overloaded with demands on their time. They also have to choose between multiple vendors all vying for their attention.

Therefore, if you don’t make it easy for them to work with you, they probably won’t. Relying on poorly designed and cluttered partner portals is a classic example of making life difficult. Expecting that partners will navigate their way through the out-of-date datasheets, training decks and other assorted detritus to find your amazing new campaign, isn’t the best way to get them engaged.



One survey found that on average 50% of supplier portal content and functionality is being ignored by partners¹¹

SECTION 3

The principles of successful through-channel marketing

Doing through-channel marketing well can be hard, but it's also not rocket science. Applying best practice, and a bit of common sense, can make a big difference to the success of your initiatives. Below we've set out eight principles of successful through-channel marketing, based on our experiences working with a range of vendors.

CLEAR 'TO PARTNER' MESSAGE

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' proposition is clearly articulated - describing the market opportunity, the support you offer to help them unlock it, and how working with you will help them make money and achieve their broader business goals.

INTEGRATED CAMPAIGN FRAMEWORKS

Any successful campaign relies on the effective use of multiple marketing tactics throughout the buying journey. When building campaigns for execution by channel partners, think about not just the content toolkit required, but also about the mix of tactics that they'll need to employ to generate the desired results.

By setting out a framework for how the tools and tactics fit together, and providing example campaign project plans and illustrative customer journeys, you can make your partners lives easier and ensure more successful execution.

INSIGHTFUL, IMPACTFUL CONTENT

To open up new conversations and secure sales, your partners need content which is relevant to customers' concerns and tells them something they don't already know. When selecting the winner vendor over others, 75% of B2B buyers said that the vendor's content had a significant impact on their buying decisions.¹²

2019 research showed that in the early stage of a buying process buyer preferences are for short form assets such as Infographics (rated valuable by 78% of B2B buyers), Listicles (76%) and E-books (61%), but in the mid-stages content such as Webinars (47%) and Video (45%) are more valued.¹³

Even in the late stages of a buying journey, vendor-supplied content can be vital to securing the sale. According to 89% of B2B buyers, winning vendors provided content that made it easier to show ROI and/or build a business case for the purchase.¹⁴

Given that many channel partners lack the resources and expertise to create high-quality content, built on unique insights, this is an area where vendors can really add value.

Providing **high-quality content**, built on **unique insights**, is an area where vendors can really **add value**



Forrester predicts the TCMA software market to grow to \$1.18 billion by 2023, a CAGR of 25.2%. Another \$1.3 billion will be generated in services at these firms.¹⁵

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.

FLEXIBLE TOOLS AND PLATFORMS

Technology is at the heart of smart marketing in today's digital world, whether it's effectively tracking emails, remarketing to website visitors, or scoring leads for telemarketing follow-up. 59% of B2B marketers credit marketing automation with delivering higher conversion rates, and 57% say it results in higher quality leads.¹⁶

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. However, flexibility and ease-of-use are key given that the marketing sophistication of different partners varies greatly. Minimal effort and time¹⁷ was highlighted by 65% of channel partners as a key factor that would encourage them to use brand-provided TCMA platforms.¹⁷

Nearly ¼ of channel partners in one survey said that lack of their own marketing resource was a key hurdle to engaging with vendor-provided marketing tools¹⁸

MARKETING-AS-A-SERVICE SUPPORT

Given that many channel partners have limited in-house resource, offering a Marketing-as-a-Service option 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 – for example, co-branding assets, building a landing page or sending out emails – enabling them to address the gaps in their own capability. Vendors offering that type of support, whether directly or more likely via a third-party such as OneGTM, typically see greater campaign take-up and more successful results.

ENGAGING AND ENABLING PARTNER TEAMS

Effective enablement is vital as part of any campaign roll-out, and it needs to address multiple audiences – including not only the marketing people who need to understand how to execute the campaign, but also critically the salespeople who need to know how to follow up on opportunities and convert interest into sales.

As part of building your campaign toolkit, think not only about the customer-facing assets, but also what partner enablement assets are required, for example, Campaign Briefing Guides and Sales Playbooks. You also need to invest the time to properly brief partners, through webinars and 1-2-1 meetings, to ensure that they understand the opportunity and how to maximise it.

Another aspect to consider, particularly when initially launching your through-channel campaigns, is what incentives you can offer to encourage adoption and build some momentum behind your programme.



ALIGNMENT WITH VENDOR PROGRAMMES

The impact of any through-channel activity will be greatest if it is aligned with the vendor's own marketing programmes. By focusing through-channel campaigns on the same themes that the vendor is talking about through their own advertising, PR and events, then the impact of those messages will be far greater. It means that partners can leverage any awareness and interest that the vendor has created.

As part of designing campaigns, vendors also need to think about which elements should be executed by partners and which should be managed by the vendor 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.

GOOD GOVERNANCE

Through-channel marketing programmes need to be supported by an effective governance framework. It's important to establish ground rules for which partners have access to the campaign and what commitment you want from them. You don't want to dilute the effectiveness of the campaign by oversaturating the market and you also want to ensure that partners are putting in the right effort to maximise the return on your investment. You should also consider how you'll align your through-channel campaigns with your MDF programme to ensure you're getting maximum return.

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

THE KEY PRINCIPLES FOR SUCCESS IN SUMMARY:

 CLEAR 'TO PARTNER' MESSAGE

 INTEGRATED CAMPAIGN FRAMEWORKS


 INSIGHTFUL, IMPACTFUL CONTENT

 FLEXIBLE TOOLS AND PLATFORMS

 MARKETING-AS-A-SERVICE SUPPORT

 ENGAGING AND ENABLING PARTNER TEAMS

 ALIGNMENT WITH VENDOR PROGRAMMES

 GOOD GOVERNANCE

In Summary

Through-channel marketing is becoming an increasingly important area for many vendors, who are heavily reliant on their channel to drive growth. Yet it is a fast-moving and relatively immature discipline, and many vendors have a way to go in terms of optimising their through-channel initiatives.

By applying best practice principles and ensuring that through-channel programmes are effectively planned and efficiently executed, vendors can generate greater return on their marketing investments. In doing so, they will strengthen engagement with channel partners, differentiate themselves in the market, and accelerate growth.



SUCCESSFUL THROUGH-CHANNEL MARKETING IN ACTION

Case Studies

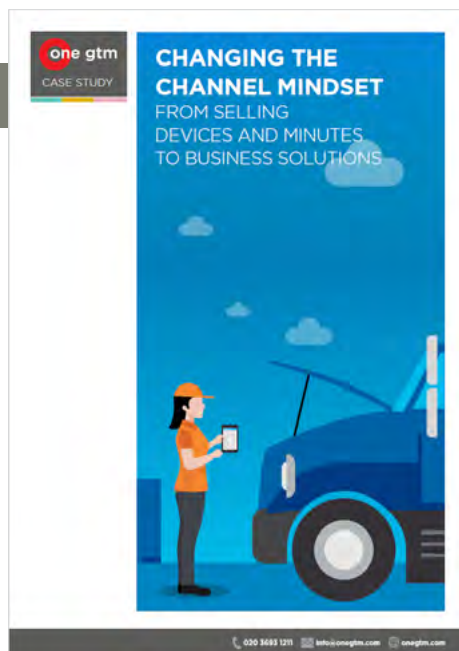
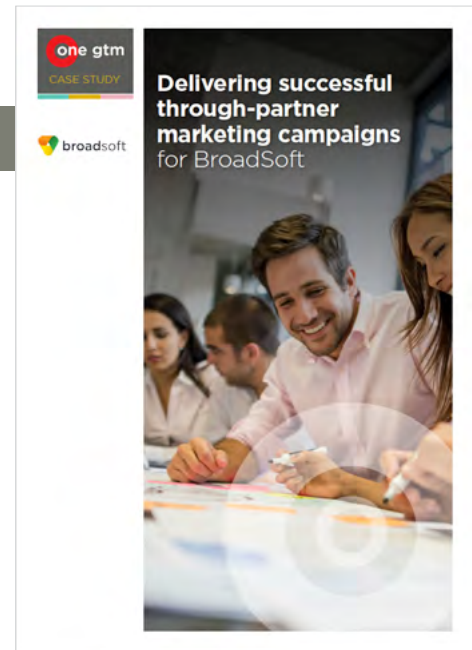
CISCO

Delivering successful through-partner marketing campaigns

Cisco (previously Broadsoft) wanted to enable Service Provider partners to increase sales of its unified communications, team collaboration and contact center platforms to SMBs.

OneGTM created the insights, strategy, content and partner toolkit for an issue-led campaign targeting the end-to-end buying journey.

The campaign achieved impressive results, with a measurable impact on pipeline and orders. One partner reported £1m+ of new opportunities and another 37 new leads within the first two months.



SAMSUNG

Changing the channel mindset

Samsung wanted to increase channel engagement and revenues by equipping them with the tools and guidance they needed to market Samsung's mobile solutions in a new way. It needed to be a scalable approach to the channel that can work across multiple partners.

The aim was to shift the channel mindset from selling devices to business solutions. We developed a series of content-led campaigns targeting the use cases for Samsung technology in a range of vertical sectors.

The outcome:

- + Increased reach** to end-user business customers by leveraging the joint offering with solution provider and wireless carrier partners.
- + Budget stretch** by deploying existing insight collateral through multiple service provider partners.
- + Stronger partner relationships** by opening up new markets for service providers and equipping them to capitalise without any heavy lifting.



About OneGTM

Helping you achieve through-channel marketing success

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

OneGTM specialise 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, including the likes of Symantec, Cisco, IBM, HPE, Samsung and Equinix. Our services include creating through-channel marketing frameworks, developing integrated, insight-led campaigns, building channel enablement assets, and providing execution support to partners. For more information on our work visit our website at onegtm.com.

If you'd like to discuss how we could help you build a successful through-channel programme then contact us at:

1. CompTIA SMB Survey, 2019
2. Evolving Landscape of the MSP Business Report, Barracuda MSP, 2019
3. Canalys, Global Cloud Market, 2019
4. B2B Buyers Survey Report, Demand Gen, 2017
5. McKinsey Digital, Saas Providers Survey, 2016
6. Forrester Consulting/ OneAffiniti, Empower Your Channel Partners Study, 2019
7. CMI B2B Content Marketing Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends, 2019
8. Canalys Partner Program Analysis 2019
9. Content Preferences Survey Report, Demand Gen, 2019
10. Forrester Research for OneAffiniti, Dec 2018
11. Zift Solutions, The Reality of Partner Portals Survey
12. B2B Buyer's Survey Report, Demand Gen, 2017
13. Content Preferences Survey Report, Demand Gen, 2019
14. B2B Buyers Survey Report 2017
15. The Forrester Wave: Through-Channel Marketing Automation, Q2 2018.
16. Communicator and Smart Insights "Managing B2B Marketing Automation", 2019
17. Empower Your Channel Partners With A Service-Led Approach to Through-Channel Marketing, Forrester Consulting/ OneAffiniti, 2019
18. Ibid