Partner Relationship Management
Best Practices Guide

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A Letter from the CEO

The Leader in Unified Channel Management

Dear Channel Professional:

Thank you for picking up this booklet on partner relationship management (PRM) best practices. We at ZINFI have been privileged to work for major Fortune 1000 companies worldwide to drive their channel programs globally. Over the past decade, we have learned what works and what doesn't. This booklet is a brief summary of some of those lessons learned for successful partner relationship management.

There is no doubt that channel management is complex. However, it's made more complex when it is managed through a set of tools and systems that are disjointed. In many organizations, channel management systems actually consist of an array of diverse systems that have evolved over a long period of time. As a result, most companies today trying to implement a unified approach to their channel management struggle to make it work and get a decent ROI. In order to build a high performing channel, it is essential to optimize channel management end-to-end. ZINFI's vision is to enable our customers to optimize their channel end-to-end via our Unified Channel Management (UCM) platform.

A Unified Channel Management (UCM) platform comprises of three core sets of processes:

1. **Partner Relationship Management (PRM):** Ensure the interaction between the organization and its partners is fully optimized and true channel potential is achieved by aligning training, programs and incentives.
2. **Partner Marketing Management (PMM):** Enable a partner to generate qualified leads in business-to-business and business-to-consumer segments by leveraging a set of pre-designed, ready-to-go assets, campaigns and programs.
3. **Partner Sales Management (PSM):** Enabling channel sales organization, as well as partners, with a set of necessary sales tools, methodologies and process steps to maximize closing at a substantially lower cost.

Development, roll-out and optimization of these three core sub-processes (PRM, PMM and PSM) result in world-class Unified Channel Management. When achieved, organizations not only generate more revenue at a lower cost, but also build a sustainable global advantage.

This booklet focuses primarily on various aspect of PRM, with emphasis on partner portal management, lead management and incentives management. We encourage you go through the various best practices articles, we hope you will walk way with pragmatic ideas that you can start implementing today to make a sustainable difference in your organization.

Recognizing the value of a true Unified Channel Management framework always starts with a solid foundation of PRM capabilities of your channel programs. As always, if you need help, have any questions or need more information don't hesitate to contact us anytime.
Cheers!

Sugata Sanyal

Sugata Sanyal
Founder and CEO

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How This Book Is Organized

This booklet is divided into seven sections, Sections I & II cover an introduction and an overview of Unified Channel Management. Section III is focused on four core elements **Partner Relationship Management (PRM)**. Here is a brief overview of these core sections:

Section IV explores various aspects of setting up a partner portal and lead management system, including what works and what doesn't. This section discusses future trends of partner portal design and development as well as how to drive partner usage of a portal locally and globally.

Section V is all about partner incentives management. Over the years by working for small to large enterprises we have seen repeatedly when partner incentives are set up right (and aligned with rest of the channel program), true channel magic happens. We have several articles in this section covering what works and what doesn't when it comes to partner incentives management.

Finally, Section VI deep dives into some of the core aspects of how to make partner relationships work. Partners are the life line of a channel centric organization, and it is incredibly important for an organization to understand how to make partners successful.

The lessons and best practices in this booklet are based on years of intensive efforts creating and deploying sophisticated channel marketing automation systems as well as ongoing discussions with our customers as we strive to understand their evolving challenges and requirements. Whether you read each section and chapter in sequence or skip around as your particular interests, we think there is a wealth of information here that even the most experienced channel marketer can learn from.

Enjoy!

1 Redefining Channel Management Through A Unified Lens

Most of us are aware of the complexity of channel management. It is even more complex for companies that are selling globally, because there is tremendous variability in requirements and parameters from region to region. I've written elsewhere about how global market requirements can have a tremendous impact on channel policies and programs, and how a company goes to market. In this chapter we will explore how a unified approach to channel management can greatly improve channel performance.

Before we delve into the solutions, however, let's talk a bit about the sources of complexity in channel management, particularly in the global context. First of all, a channel management infrastructure needs to account for different types of partners—whether they are alliance partners, go-to-market partners, solutions and services partners, or training partners—and how they form different parts of the ecosystem. Channel management needs to address the unique requirements of these different partner types. It also needs to take into account variations in market and industry requirements, which depend in part on whether the vendor operates in a business-to-business (B2B) or a business-to-consumer (B2C) environment.

We also know that markets vary considerably by country. For example banking, finance and insurance are industries that are highly variable by geography, depending on the maturity of the country as well as local laws. Similar dynamics are at play in healthcare, education, government and other verticals in the B2B space. When a vendor is selling to consumers, channel management tends to be a bit more horizontal across countries and regions. However, there are big differences between developed countries and developing countries in terms of how B2C channels are managed.

Finally, the constant changes and evolution in products, services and solutions introduce still more complexities for channel management. For example, when a specific product like shampoo is rolled out globally, requiring significant localization of marketing and messaging, the approach is going to differ substantially from the approach required for high-tech products like manufacturing devices or network components or software, which are sold to businesses and marketed in a way that typically requires less localization. Differences like these have an impact on the level of information that needs to flow through the channel and the

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complexity of managing the channel as you pursue channel marketing goals and initiatives.

I hope you can begin to see that one of the most important steps in establishing a unified approach to channel management is to take a broad, longer-term view. "Rome was not built in a day" may be a cliché, but it expresses a particularly apt principle for channel management. To be truly successful in channel management, you need to have an overarching business strategy in place. One of the first things a company needs to decide is whether they are going to market directly to end users or via the channel. Most companies that sell consumer products market, by default, through some sort of distributor network. But even then they need to decide whether they are going to sell through franchises (e.g., Burger King or McDonald's) or sell directly through captive outlets (e.g., Starbucks). The same kinds of considerations apply when selling complex solutions through the channel, especially in the technology segment. The direct vs. channel discussion needs to be clear and upfront from the beginning, and then the strategy needs to be communicated repeatedly to the channel partners. Otherwise, they may feel their business is being undercut by the company. This is why, for example, high-value products like the Apple products are generally sold directly to consumers through Apple retail stores. When they are sold through channel partners the products are rarely discounted to eliminate any pricing conflict or share-shifting.

The same kinds of discussions take place in other industries. Companies have to decide whether to sell via open channels or closed channels. Whether the industry is insurance or real estate or banking or high-tech products, at some point specialty capabilities may be required on the reseller side, such as initial certification or additional investments, and in cases like these partners may require assurances from the vendor that they won't make the products or services available to everybody and they'll ensure there's enough business available to a specific channel partner so they can break even on their investment costs. That's why the open channel vs. closed channel issue must be thought through and discussed in a very clear way.

Once a company has established a high-level channel policy and a distribution strategy, the next step is to think about the people structure, because at the end of the day companies do not do business with companies; people do. That's one reason it's so important to set up the right channel infrastructure—to make sure that high-volume partners who play a very important role have high touch, but at the same time ensure that partners who do not sell a lot do not feel left out. This is where organizing your channel management infrastructure is critical to make sure all partners not only feel valued and important but also get the level of support that's appropriate to their profile. From the company side, you need to ensure the channel management infrastructure is not cost-prohibitive but can actually drive growth and scalability.

A third important consideration in establishing a unified approach to channel management is process. When a partner is onboarded and has access to contracts, training modules, incentives, etc.—all

those processes need to be clearly defined in advance, and they should be different for partners who have been doing business with the company for a long time. Processes related to deal registration and protection are incredibly important in the case of high-value deals where partners need to be sure there is no over-distribution of solutions to the channel and so they don't end up fighting among themselves over price and losing collectively against other competitor solutions and products. Also, from an overall process perspective, both marketing and sales teams need to make sure that partners can differentiate from each other—a requirement that, by the way, extends to the solution structure itself. Often, vendors put programs together which are mass-distributed and don't provide specific partners or partner types with the opportunity to rise to the top, and that can result in some partners disengaging and guarantee the failure of certain channel initiatives.

These leads to my fourth consideration in establishing a unified channel management approach: programs. Companies can drive channel performance based on several factors. First of all, programs that are rolled out need to be closely aligned with partner competency. A partner that has just signed up with company may not be eligible to sell certain kinds of products and services, whether B2B or B2C. There also needs to be close alignment with the partner business model. Pushing incentives programs that aren't aligned with a partner's sales and marketing focus may completely waste channel management resources behind programs that don't yield any results. The company's rewards structure needs to be carefully thought through. Rewarding a specific high-volume partner through back-end rebates or additional support mechanisms should be a very different process from setting up programs that drive individual sales rewards where each sales person can be motivated with specific incentives and rewards that will drive transactions. This latter approach tends to work well on transactional products where a salesperson does not need to rely on multiple functions to pull solutions together. However, if a program is rolled out and tied to an individual reward, but the salesperson is heavily dependent on the vendor's marketing or technical or support infrastructure, that company or program can fail completely just because it wasn't thought through properly.

> *A channel management infrastructure needs to account for different types of partners—whether they are alliance partners, go-to-market partners, solutions and services partners, or training partners—and how they form different parts of the ecosystem*

A final consideration in putting together a unified channel management approach is technology, which is obviously extremely important. In fact, at ZINFI we have coined the term "unified channel management," in part to highlight three interrelated core elements of our channel management technology: Partner Relationship Management, partner marketing management and partner sales management.

With Partner Relationship Management, the primary focus is on how the vendor interacts with and manages the partner—signing agreements with the partner, getting them trained, providing incentives, managing performance based on several specific criteria, all at a holistic level.

Partner marketing management, on the other hand, is about enabling partners to go drive demand on their own leveraging marketing assets, sales programs, product initiatives and the like. Partner sales management applies mostly to enterprise-level sales, where people are actually trained through a multi-month, complex sales cycle using a step-by-step approach designed to ensure participants aren't overwhelmed by superfluous sales and marketing tools.

From a technology platform perspective, it is incredibly important—whether we are thinking about Partner Relationship Management, partner marketing management or partner sales management—to make sure all of these elements, individually or collectively, come with a set of business analytics tools for channel management. These tools allow the channel management team to slice and dice the data in various ways to gain insights into what is really going on, to understand what's working and what isn't, and to be able to actions based on that information.

If we step back and look at all of the things we need to consider and think through in order for channel management to excel, we might be justified in wondering how the channel actually works today. Well, the truth of the matter is that for many organizations it doesn't work nearly as well as it should. However, where there is proper alignment of channel policies, people, process, programs and platform, it is certainly possible to look at channel management through a unified lens of high performance, and drive growth at a lower cost in a global context.

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2 How to Make Unified Channel Management a Reality

There is no doubt that channel management is complex. However, the complexity only increases when it is managed with a set of tools and systems that can easily be compared to a patched-up quilt. In many organizations, channel management systems actually consist of a hodgepodge of diverse systems that have evolved over a long period of time. As a result, most companies that try to implement a unified approach to their channel management struggle to make it work and get a decent return on their investment. The primary reason for this is a lack of available end-to-end systems that can readily adapt to each organization's unique needs. Every company is different. So, for example, a horizontal product like a customer relationship management (CRM) system cannot really address the requirements for unified channel management. While marketing automation systems have evolved quite a bit over the last few years, and CRM systems have also progressed considerably, no company has completely addressed the need for unified channel management.

So, how are organizations managing the channel today? Here are some of the key areas they are attempting to address, although rarely with complete success:

Partner portal: Most companies that are selling through the channel today have a partner portal. They build this partner portal over a period of years with various sets of tools, but there are no consistent standards that address how a portal should be built, and requirements also vary considerably across different types of channels. For example, if you're looking at a dealer network where the relationship is highly transactional, the partner portal will look very different from a portal in, say, the tech industry, where a solutions provider is working very closely with one or more technology providers to bring in complex, integrated solutions to the market. Similarly, a partner portal in the retail and franchise segment of the marketplace will be unique to those kinds of businesses. Because of this diversity in needs across segments, no vendor has been able to address the requirements for all segments.

Partner records: If we look at how most companies are selling through the channel, and in particular how they manage their partner records or their channel records, we find that most of them are using a CRM or some sort of home-grown database. In fact, based on a survey we conducted, more than 40% of companies actually end up managing their partner list on an Excel spreadsheet. That's kind of scary, but that's where the market is today.

Partner onboarding: When it comes to building and growing a channel, partner onboarding is a critical first step. Yet most companies today try to manage partner onboarding with some sort of combination of CRM and Microsoft Office tools like Excel, and some even resort to keeping track through paper records.

Partner programs: To manage partner programs, some companies have started to use marketing automation tools like Oracle Eloqua or Marketo for direct marketing. However, those tools are way too complex for most organizations and they are not flexible enough to be deployed in a multi-tier channel where corporate can load campaigns and content, distribute those materials to their partners and execute marketing initiatives in a variety of shapes and forms.

Partner training is another area where very few companies have structured systems in place. But what's the point of recruiting partners if you don't have a structured way of getting them trained and increasing their competencies? Many large enterprises today have some sort of learning management system (LMS), but when you take a step down to companies below the $500 million level or to companies that sell to other segments, they typically have serious issues managing partner training.

A final, and very important, area of concern is partner incentives management. This is yet another area where it's quite commonplace to deploy a patchwork of multitude systems for managing market development funds, rewards, rebates, etc.

So, as we consider the challenge of unified channel management, we see that although companies may have the best of intentions in their efforts to pull together the right programs, the deployment and execution of those programs can be an absolute nightmare because there are no end-to-end systems that exist today to make it happen. However, companies like ZINFI and a few others are now working very hard to innovate with the goal of providing a complete, end-to-end, unified channel management infrastructure that can be not only modular but also comprehensive if all the modules are turned on and used in the right order.

If we step back and look at the problem from a systems perspective at a macro level and consider the core requirements of unified channel management, we can break it down into five parts, what I call the five Ps:

1. **Profiles** (partner profile management): Partner profiles represent the most important first step in understanding existing partners' capability to sell into various segments of

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the market. Establishing the partner profile is also a precursor to expanding and growing the channel based on an understanding of what type of DNA an organization should be looking for when they are trying to recruit new partners. Without a sophisticated database system, it's almost impossible to analyze and manage a diverse set of partner profiles to drive productivity.

2. **Policies:** Channel policies determine who will sell to what and how. If a channel program has various types of partners, the competencies and reach of those partners, as well as the relationships they bring in, determine whether or not they are actually able to sell. If those policies are not absolutely clear, Unified Channel Management becomes really hard because organizations won't know what exactly to implement.
3. **Programs:** When we talk about programs, we're referring not just to campaigns like partner recruitment and partner training, but also the ability to put together market-segment-oriented solutions, training, incentives and so on to provide a truly unified channel management framework that allows an organization to recruit, engage, enable and manage their partner base to achieve a desired level of growth. Programs are critical, but they need to be analyzed from an ROI perspective. A unified channel management system should provide the tools that an organization needs to quickly perform such an analysis.
4. **People:** This is one of the most important Ps. How the field organization is structured, how territories are mapped, how the relationships between the regions and the worldwide organization work—all of these factors contribute to the broader framework required for people management to drive performance. However, without the right structure and the right Unified Channel Management system mapped into that structure, it's almost impossible to move fast enough and see through a dashboard what is going on in real time.
5. **Platform:** This is where tools and systems come in. Earlier I talked about why platforms are important. However, before a company can deploy a truly unified channel management system at a global level, it must think through the first four Ps mentioned above. How are we going to manage our partner profiling and profiles? What actions are we going to take based on that understanding? Are there policies in place that need to be aligned or streamlined? And can we streamline policies without a channel management system in place? What programs makes sense, and what data do we have to analyze programs and dynamically respond based on ROI analysis? How can we align the people to look for the most efficient structure? Once these questions have been answered, we're in a much better position to consider how to implement a system on a step-by-step basis so the organization is not overwhelmed but is able to systematically increase its maturity level through transparency and performance management globally.

Based on the points I've made above, you can see that unified channel management is indeed complex. However, with a thoughtful approach that focuses on the five Ps I've outlined here, an organization can create a maturity map through which they can substantially improve the performance of their channel organization and deploy systems that will make unified channel management a reality.

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❸ Why CRMs Don't Work As Partner Relationship Management Systems

Customer relationship management (CRM) has evolved into a multi-billion dollar segment, with good reason. However, the Partner Relationship Management (PRM) category is relatively new, even though channel programs have been around for many decades. Why is that?

Well, phone systems for tracking and taking better care of customers were essentially started by the airline industry back in the late Sixties and early Seventies as the volume of ticketing requests and changes began to grow. Next, in the Eighties and Nineties, as computers took over the business environment, contact management software evolved as the better version of a Rolodex.

Starting in the mid-Nineties, contact management software started to evolve into the precursor to what we now know as a customer relationship management. This development was driven by companies like SAP and the like, who were focused also on processes like inventory management and financial controls as features of their enterprise resource management software.
Salesforce.com took a visionary role in taking on-premise sales management software to the cloud and deservingly became market share leader in this category. This category further evolved to provide a combination of three core functionalities – marketing automation integration, sales process automation and support.

However, comparatively little time or resources have been devoted by the CRM market leaders to building a purpose-built application that addresses the workflow of channel management. Focused on solving the horizontal problem of Salesforce automation, the bigger players have overlooked the need to address channel marketing automation by development purpose-built applications like partner relationship management (PRM).

Typical CRM software includes core management and tracking functionality such as leads, contacts, opportunities, tasks and projects, that allow a sales person to develop prospects and track them through to close a sale. Most CRM systems do a good job of sales tracking and post sales account management activities by linking modules like tasks, calendars, quotations and invoicing. There is a plethora of other applications that can be added to

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extend some of the core CRM functionalities for channel management purposes. However, the main challenge with this approach is to take a horizontal product that works for B2B sales, and make it functional in a very different environment. Channel sales, for a start is a two to three tier process, and it gets even more complex than that.

Channel marketing entails a whole different set of requirements for functions including partner recruitment, partner engagement, partner enablement and partner management, that are not addressed by current CRM systems. Almost all CRMs provide excellent functionality for contact management, tracking sales activities, reducing labor needed to send out a quote, close a sale, or grow a current account, but almost none are able to adapt to the dynamic, multi-tenant environment that is a prerequisite for any channel management structure.

Almost all channel management activities require constant recruitment of existing and/or new resellers into a specific set of programs, plus integrated outbound marketing tools that none of the CRM tools offer today. Once a partner has been recruited, they must be properly classified, or profiled and to be clustered into a specific group of vertical or other classifications, but most CRMs today are not flexible enough to complete this profiling activity. As a further example, it is essential to track training progress and development of that partner's competence. While there are stand-alone learning management systems that could potentially be patched into an existing CRM program, the majority are not flexible enough for this. As a result, CRM software doesn't allow channel account managers to determine their partners' evolving technical skill level, which is a critical requirement for B2B IT solutions sales. These and other needs call for purpose-designed applications like partner relationship management software.

If partner recruitment, engagement and training are the core gaps in an existing CRM system, the challenges of generating demand via a set of channel partners and enabling them with market development funds (MDF), sales rewards and rebates are only exaggerated by using a typical CRM. As a result, many organizations take the DIY approach of building their own in-house campaigns, assets, MDF, rewards and rebates forms. But these are rarely well-integrated and quickly become too complex ever to be productive. This leads to poor ROI from the effort and investment of recruiting and training partners.

With CRM systems so evidently unfitted for channel marketing purposes, what automation tools can an IT vendor use to improve partner productivity? The answer is to use Partner Relationship Management (PRM) software. There are several newer vendors, small yet powerful, who provide a wide set of options for technology vendors selling through the channel. PRM solutions like ZINFI's, are purpose-built for channel management and marketing. ZINFI's platform allows vendors not only to pick the right set of partner recruitment, training and enablement tools to drive demand, but also create a partner marketing management infrastructure by deploying market development funds (MDF), rewards and rebates. These are all capabilities that none of the CRM applications today can match.

4 What Is a Best-of-Breed Partner Relationship Management Platform?

A best-of-breed Partner Relationship Management platform should address the management of the partner lifecycle in a highly efficient and effective way. The five core elements are partner recruitment, partner onboarding, partner training, partner marketing and partner incentives management. In addition to addressing these five core elements individually, a best-of-breed Partner Relationship Management platform should also be able to unify the lifecycle management across these five core stages. Let's take a look at these core elements and see how they fit together.

1. **Partner recruitment:** In this phase, a company needs to be able to upload a list of prospective partners collected from various sources or set up a search and social campaign to drive traffic, via both inbound and outbound methods, to a destination microsite. On this microsite, the company needs to articulate in a very clear way why a potential channel partner should consider joining the company's program. As a part of this process, the company may also hire outsourced telemarketing or event marketing, or an inside sales team may reach out to the targeted list of partners and engage in dialogue to get them excited about various aspects of the company's partner program. This process of recruitment can last anywhere between a couple of months and several years, depending on the company's overall channel strategy. Often, large organizations end up acquiring smaller entities, which creates the need to re-recruit existing partners for new product categories. Here's the bottom line: A Partner Relationship Management platform should be able to provide an integrated set of outreach components—e.g., search, social, microsite, events—that inbound and outbound marketing teams can use to engage and excite potential partners and motivate them to join the partner program.
2. **Partner onboarding:** Once a set of partners have signed up for an existing channel program, the next step is to provide a high-quality experience to the partner base related to partner onboarding. During this phase, partners will need to sign a contract with the company based on the products and categories they will carry. They will also very likely have to put together a business plan, depending on what type of partner they are and the goals they are pursuing. The next step would be to make sure they can track their progress as they move through onboarding and initial training stages. The

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vendor who has recruited the partners should also be able to track the status of partners at various stages. Automating all of these onboarding steps is critical to providing a high-quality experience from the very beginning as partners begin to engage with the vendor. A state-of-the-art Partner Relationship Management platform should address this need clearly and comprehensively.

3. **Partner training:** The third core element of the partner lifecycle is partner training. This applies both to new partners and existing partners. Very likely, a company with a robust channel program is constantly introducing new programs, new products, new offers and new pricing strategies. Accordingly, channel partners need to be continuously trained on various aspects of the changes a company is making to its channel program. This is where a learning management system (LMS) can play a huge role. A best-of-breed Partner Relationship Management platform should provide modules for course creation, course management, learning path management and certification management. Training is a very important aspect of Partner Relationship Management. A highly trained partner also tends to be a highly satisfied and successful partner. Therefore, it is critical to be able to create various training programs on a regular basis. It's also critical to use other integrated marketing tools like search, social, events, microsites and so on to promote training programs and keep partners engaged in various aspects of training.
4. **Partner marketing:** Once onboarding is complete and the partner is engaged in various training programs, the next step is to focus on generating leads and driving demand. This is where partner marketing and channel marketing automation capabilities come in. A best-of-breed Partner Relationship Management platform should provide an integrated set of through-channel marketing and/or through-partner marketing automation tools. Such capabilities should include end-user-facing search marketing, social marketing, microsite marketing, event marketing, video marketing and various other digital and analog marketing tools. When partners have the ability to use preloaded campaigns and assets and quickly set up co-branded campaigns and launch them to their target installed base of clients, they are well-positioned to drive the effectiveness of their partner marketing initiatives, whether those initiatives are B2B or B2C. Most partners do not have much in the way of marketing resources; therefore, in addition to a marketing automation platform, a vendor needs to consider providing marketing concierge services—either insourced, by leveraging internal marketing teams, or outsourced to an external partner marketing concierge company like ZINFI. In fact, a partner marketing automation tool and a partner marketing concierge program are probably the two most important components a partner can use for generating leads. As such, a Partner Relationship Management platform should be able to address both capabilities by providing an integrated set of partner marketing tools as well as automating marketing concierge activities and processes.
5. **Partner incentives management:** To address the final core element of Partner Relationship Management, vendors need to be sure their partners are continuously trained and informed about new campaigns and programs and incentives that are being loaded into the platform on a regular basis. Performance-based incentives are essential to generating leads, and a unified approach to partner incentives management is critical. Application modules like market development funds (MDF), co-op management, rewards and rebates are key elements in automating incentives programs where a partner's performance can be directly tied to the rewards or incentives they can earn, both at the individual level of a sales rep or technical person and at the company level where the company can earn additional rebates and/or margin when they hit specified sales targets.

To be successful, any partner program requires several key elements. It requires a structured channel program. It requires clear channel policies so partners know exactly what they need to do to perform successfully and how their performance is going to be measured and rewarded. It requires clear programs that address both technical and non-technical aspects of the channel program. It also requires a platform which enables a unified approach to channel management. A best-of-breed Partner Relationship Management platform can make a huge difference. Companies that have deployed, or are in the process of deploying, point solutions in the attempt to create a patched-up partner portal or partner management system are likely to regret it in the long run. They will end up spending a lot more money and end up with a far inferior partner experience and internal experience than they would if they were to consider one of the new best-of-breed Partner Relationship Management platforms that are currently being offered in the marketplace by ZINFI and others.

> *"The five core elements are partner recruitment, partner onboarding, partner training, partner marketing and partner incentives management"*

❺ The Most Important Feature for Your PRM Software

The most recent trend in channel marketing automation has been the rapid deployment of Partner Relationship Management (PRM) Software along with Partner Marketing Management (PMM) capabilities in multiple industry verticals. In this article, we will focus specifically on the value of Partner Profile Manager (PPM) as a core feature for PRM Software.

Before we begin, let's discuss the rationale for using a Partner Profile Manager (PPM) and how it can help. The primary use for a Partner Profile Manager (PPM) in PRM Software is to make sure the vendor selling through the channel has detailed records for each partner company and their team members. This functions almost like CRM software, but with a lot more data and search capability associated with a specific partner profile. We have discussed earlier how partner profiling can boost channel sales. The main objective of the Partner Profile Management tool in PRM Software is to give a vendor the ability to profile or segment their partner on a dynamic basis, and use that segmentation data to take different business decision and actions.

Partner Profile Management plays a very important role in PRM Software by helping users understand the following:

1. **Firmographics of the partner company:** This typically covers how many employees the partner company has, the key office locations, the market segments they serve, how long they have been in the business, what their credit rating is, etc. This information can be collected dynamically in the PPM tool of the PRM software from various database sources that are publicly available in most developed countries. In developing countries, this information will need to be pulled together manually from various sources, including telephone research and surveys.
2. **Business mix:** Once you know who your partners are, the next most logical parameter for profiling is to understand their business mix – i.e., product versus services. A partner's ability to sell services directly depends on their ability to understand a specific vertical. As a result, partners who sell services also tend to specialize in certain verticals. These partners tend to work with a group of vendors and carry their solutions as a bundle. The right PRM Software can capture this information for you.
3. **Technical competence:** A specific partner may sell into multiple industry verticals, such as healthcare, finance,

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insurance, real estate, manufacturing and education. If the product or solution the partner is selling varies by segment, then the partner will need specific marketing, sales and technical ability to sell that specific solution. It is crucial to dynamically track this data in PRM Software via the PPM tool.

4. **Sales velocity:** One of the core capabilities of your PRM Software is the ability to access your point-of-sales data and dynamically show the sales velocity of your individual partners. Once you align this data with data about partner firmographics, business mix and technical competency, you will be able to see a storyline that will start making sense. Having this storyline allows you to differentiate partners by programs, capabilities, etc., so you can focus on partners with different storylines in different ways. This differentiated approach will not only help you increase your sales velocity, but will also enhance partner profitability by allowing them to differentiate from each other.
5. **Growth potential:** Last but not least, the most important outcome of the partner profiling capability embedded in your PRM Software is continued engagement with your partner base, getting their feedback and linking feedback to their performance data to predict the growth potential of each and every one of your customers. You cannot control how a partner will run their business and where they will invest specifically. However, you can clearly lay out investment criteria by informing the partners what the rules of engagement are and where your organization is willing to invest to make them successful. Alignment of your program strategy via growth potential analysis is critical.

Keeping in mind these requirements that PRM Software can fulfill via its PPM capability, now we need to consider how to make this happen. This is a much-needed capability, especially as your channel grows, but it can provide truly significant insight even if you are dealing truly only with 50 to 100 partners. As we noted earlier, the primary goal should be to carry out the profiling in a dynamic way. For example, when your partners update their records (based on regular update requests or programs, etc.), those changes should be reflected dynamically in your PRM software. Up-to-date knowledge of your partner base is a critical competitive advantage, because it allows you to do more with less.

Certainly you can jump-start the profile activity manually by carrying out surveys, adding data from secondary databases like Hoover's and so on, but the platform should allow you to do the profiling dynamically and keep your database fresh and up-to-date so that your channel sales organization can act quickly.
Here are the five core technical requirements that you must consider to make sure your PRM software is capable of providing you with dynamic Partner Profile Management:

1. **Dynamic data connectivity:** In most developed countries, there are multiple business data providers like Dun & Bradstreet, Hoover's, Data.com, etc. Today, most also provide a dynamic data connection interface, which, when properly integrated with your PRM software, pulls in your partner business information on a regular basis. This allows you to keep your firmographic data for your partner base up-to-date and current.
2. **Technical certification integration:** If you are using a Learning Management System (LMS) then you should be able to connect your PRM software to your LMS module and dynamically populate the status of your partners.
3. **Point-of-sales data integration:** There are various vendors in the marketplace who can provide you with this capability, but you can also do this manually by getting POS data from your distributors, organized by partner ID, in Excel format. As long as your PRM software allows you to upload POS data in an Excel data file, then you can update this once per quarter and see where your partners stand. This is an easy way to get you almost 95% of the way there.
4. **Manual research update:** In addition to the dynamic data updates from various sources, you will also need to update your partner records via survey and telephone research. This can be done for the following areas:
   a) Attitudinal & satisfaction research – This measures how your partners feel about various aspect of your business relationship with them.
   b) Needs discovery research – This is primarily for scoping out new products and services ideas.
   Once you have got the data from these two types of surveys, that information must be kept within your PRM software and Partner Profile Manager.
5. **Business planning:** Last but not least: Ensure that as your channel management organization engages with your partners – especially the top-tier ones – and as they develop business plans, those data get synced back to your PRM software and its Partner Profile Manager

Any organization considering deployment of PRM software must carefully think through how it is going to increase its maturity across the channel management. Before an organization makes a significant investment in channel automation, their first step should be to build a Partner Profile Management infrastructure and management process around it. The right PRM software can not only enable the deployment, but also significantly streamline (and reduce costs for) day-to-day management, driving better decisions to achieve profitable growth. Proper deployment of Partner Profile Management capability can accelerate an organization's understanding of the status of the channel, thereby allowing the organization to make the right investment decisions. This is the ultimate result of "doing the right things right."

6 7 Ways to Use PRM Software to Enhance Ease of Doing Business

Selling via an indirect sales channel is never easy, especially if you are trying to do it at a global level with multiple product lines catering to all kinds of verticals. The complexity of managing such a channel can be overwhelming, and that complexity can also make it really hard for partners to do business with the vendor. This is where purpose-built partner relationship management (PRM) software can help. In this article, we will explore how PRM software can significantly enhance the ease of doing business for a vendor's partner base.

Before we discuss the benefits of PRM software, however, let's explore some of the core challenges partners face as they do business with a vendor selling through the channel.

1. **Complex program and partner relationship management requirements:** Most vendors selling through the channel have built their channel program over the years, and the cost of change and/or the fear of change have prevented vendors from simplifying their channel programs. The combination of program complexity, a patchwork of partner portal applications, and a lack of purpose-built PRM software can make doing business very complex.
2. **The portal is not mobile-friendly:** The partner portal is the first and last handshake a partner has with the vendor. However, if you are not using purpose-built PRM software, it's likely your portal is not fully mobile-responsive and the patchwork of applications you use to manage your partner relationships is really hard to navigate via a mobile interface. This is a critical hurdle that partners must struggle to overcome every time they log on.
3. **Hard–to-find content:** A primary purpose of your partner portal is to allow your partners to self-serve and access the many vendor-provided channel programs that are in place without calling the vendor for assistance. Without a purpose-built partner portal powered by world class PRM software, however, searching for and finding relevant marketing assets, programs, sales materials and other content can be very difficult.

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4. **Complicated navigation:** If your partner portal has evolved over the years and has become a patched-up quilt of discrete applications, chances are most of the applications (partner contracts, training, incentives, deal registrations, etc.) come from different vendors and there is little navigational consistency. The multiplicity of interfaces can be downright confusing. This is where purpose-built PRM software that encompasses end-to-end channel management can make a big difference, providing users with a clean, consistent, logical interface that remains the same wherever they are within the portal.
5. **Lack of dynamic alerts:** Keeping partners informed in a way that us useful to them is critical. That's why partners need to be able to configure and manage alerts for their own unique purposes—whether the alerts have to do with deal registration or incentives approval or training certification expirations. Unfortunately, most partner portals do not allow this to happen. If you deploy purpose-built PRM software, however, you can absolutely overcome this issue and enable partners to manage their alert-based workflows much better and faster.

All in all, doing business is hard, even frustrating, for your partners if have not properly deployed and configured PRM software to power your partner portal and programs. So now let's explore in more detail how state-of-the-art PRM software can help your partners overcome these challenges.

1. **Streamline partner onboarding:** Partner engagement starts with the recruitment of new partners into current programs and existing partners into new programs. Properly built PRM software can significantly augment and automate the partner onboarding process.
2. **Make agreement management easy:** The first step in getting a partner onboarded is signing agreements. For many organizations, this is a painstaking, manual process that is difficult to keep track of. However, when a vendor deploys state-of-the-art PRM software, the agreement management process can be automated and streamlined, thereby increasing partner satisfaction substantially.
3. **Dynamic business planning:** Business planning is a very important activity for mid-market and enterprise- level partners, as well as large-scale dealers and wholesalers. Again, for many of today's organizations this is still a manual process, and there is no automated way to track performance. Deploying a dynamic business planning module from a reputable PRM software vendor can significantly streamline the planning process and make tracking easy and efficient.
4. **Integrated demand generation:** Demand generation is a core area where vendors have a strong incentive to enable partners. Today, most vendors lacking state-of-the-art PRM software must provide co-branded asset capabilities via slow, awkward workarounds like downloadable ZIP files. Best-in-class PRM software will provide integrated demand generation capabilities (tools and tactics) right out of the box.
5. **Make incentive management easy:** We have all heard the cliché: "sales people are coin-operated." Well, there is a reason the channel is called a reseller channel, because it is primarily made up of sales people. Yes, there are some marketers involved, but most channel partners are resellers, including big box retailers. They can push vendor-branded content, but are rarely able to generate excitement on their own. However, with the right tools, a partner's sales organization can be incentivized properly to align partner and vendor goals and drive results. Using state-of-the-art PRM software, a vendor can automate this process, track results and adjust programs based on real-time business intelligence.
6. **Creative competition:** Making it easy for partners to do business is a very important aspect of any channel program, but making it fun is also important. State-of-the-art PRM software should provide gamification features such as leader boards across various functions and programs to make competing with other individuals and partner organizations and achieving success enjoyable.
7. **Provide intelligence:** Knowing what works and why it works is incredibly important for a channel program to grow and succeed. However, without the right PRM software it is almost impossible to figure out the keys to success and make correlations between investments and returns—something all channel professionals want.

As you can see from this summary, running a large, diverse channel can be very challenging, but making it perform at a higher level is even harder. However, there is hope. There are several companies, like ZINFI, who provide state-of-the-art PRM software that can change how you interact with your channel overnight with very little investment. Breaking even and even doubling your investment dollars typically happens not in months or years, but in days. If you are constantly hearing from your channel that it is hard to do business with you...yes, be sure to systematically evaluate your channel programs, policies and people, but also make sure that you carefully evaluate the PRM software you are using—or should be using—to move your channel into the digital age.

7 Reasons to Deploy PRM Systems for Manufacturing Organizations

Most manufacturers have always had the distribution networks to sell their products locally and globally. With the advent of information technology, vendors of all kinds introduced fast-paced selling into a channel environment, but in fact manufacturers have relied on local and global trades from the early days of modern history. Whether it was Chinese silk, Indian spices or Italian marble, in the end they all found business-people who were willing to take the risks posed by pirates, bandits, disease and wars to transport goods from one part of the word to the other. While the threats of pirates and bandits have subsided considerably over the years, manufacturers still struggle at times to keep pace with more technology-savvy hardware and software vendors when it comes to deploying automation to support a global channel. In this article, we will explore how manufacturers can benefit from partner relationship management (PRM) systems, and what factors they should take into consideration to find the right solution for their business.

The manufacturing segment in the US is about twice the size of the high-tech segment, but it accounts for four times the number of small, medium and large firms. While the US high-tech segment has seen rapid growth among independent software vendors (ISVs) in recent years, the manufacturing segment has remained relatively flat. At a global level, manufacturing organizations are not only forming across all countries, but they are also changing rapidly due to automation, predictive analytics and, most recently, artificial intelligence. So, while manufacturers have invested into state-of-the-art manufacturing and process technologies to stay ahead of their competitors, in most cases they have not yet deployed automation on the front end—i.e., marketing and sales—or in the partner relationship management (PRM) arena.

Typically, manufacturers' back-end supply chain and manufacturing processes are using the latest technologies, but most front-end investments have been skimpy. Over the past 40 years, manufacturers have invested in automation for activities like enterprise resource planning (ERP) and enterprise asset management (EAM). These activities are mostly focused on logistics, inventory management, work in process (WIP) management, return of capital, etc. To address the front end, most organizations have tried to

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get by using back-end technologies, which are not purpose-built for digital marketing and sales or for PRM activities. This suggests that PRM systems could make a positive and substantial impact for manufacturers.

As a result of this lack of investment in front-end technologies, most manufacturers tend to rely on archaic software platforms, which are not only work poorly for the latest digital marketing and sales processes, but also fail to address the need for a holistic approach to creating an integrated buyer's journey. These problems are compounded if the manufacturing organization sells both directly and via a channel. The absence of an integrated approach not only impacts profitable growth, but also leaves channel partners deeply dissatisfied. The failure to integrate across the buyer's journey leads to unnecessary complexity and friction for manufacturers, as does the absence of highly effective channel programs offered by vendors from other high-growth segments, like technology and finance.

All of this means there is a huge opportunity for manufacturers to build a competitive advantage through a network of digitally enabled wholesalers, distributors, resellers and other partners who can augment their solution, extend their reach and add value to an installation above and beyond the preliminary purchase. We have seen over the years that manufacturers of highly commoditized products, such as piping, water filtration, measuring equipment and so on, can not only achieve dramatic reductions in operating costs, but also increase reach through proper deployment of partner relationship management (PRM) systems.

We have discussed in multiple articles what a partner relationship system is, what features it needs to have and how best to deploy it. We have also discussed in other articles how a PRM system is different from a customer relationship management (CRM) system. I won't explore these two areas further in this article. However, I do want to take a few minutes to talk about how a manufacturing organization can plan the deployment of an effective PRM system.

Let me summarize briefly the seven core reasons a manufacturer should select a partner relationship management (PRM) system to automate its indirect (channel) sales motions:

1. **Overall channel strategy** – This should address how the channel plays a role in current and future growth ambitions of the manufacturing organization. Channel strategy should also address various go-to-market motions, such as direct selling, selling via original equipment manufacturers—where there is a primary vendor who buys parts from other

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vendors—and after-market selling—e.g., when something is sold via one equipment manufacture, but post-purchase. The nature of PRM systems will depend on the exact nature of overall channel strategy.

2. **Sales mix plan** – Selection of a PRM system greatly depends not just on the overall go-to-market plan, but also on the overall direct-versus-indirect (channel) sales ratio or mix. If most of the sales are flowing through the channel, the sales organization is essentially there to support partners and only a few deals are taken directly, then a PRM system would suffice without installing a dedicated CRM system. However, if the direct sales are substantial and complex, then having a dedicated CRM system can help as well.
3. **Onboarding workflows** – Depending on the nature of the product segment, if there is a constant flow of new products, not necessarily stock keeping units (SKUs), then it is essential for the manufacturer to have a logical onboarding program where channel partners are educated in new product training, selling, incentives, etc., on an ongoing basis. Onboarding automation requires a flexible PRM system that can not only be configured by product lines and geographies, but also re-configured quickly and frequently depending on the nature of changes.
4. **Learning management** – In today's digital world, many manufacturers still engage in a physical training and delivery mode. There are two primary reasons for this: First, the partner base is not digital-savvy and/or second, the vendor doesn't have digital content to distribute. Both are significant barriers, but the latter issue can be easily overcome with some incremental investment and digitization of content. The ROI from a digital learning management application—a part of any state-of-the-art PRM system—is significant.
5. **Sales enablement** – One of the key aspects of a manufacturing channel is the complexity of product-related content that can be associated with hundreds, even millions, of product parts or SKUs. Even today, one shouldn't be surprised to see manufacturers print parts books and ship them to their resellers on a regular basis – at times even weekly or monthly. The good news is there is a better way, and that is digitization of all of this product-related content via a state-of-the-art PRM system.
6. **Lead management** – Depending on the nature of the sales motion and mix, if the manufacturing organization wants to distribute leads generated by its direct marketing team to channel partners, then a PRM system is essential. As we have discussed in many other articles, for lead

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management to work, aligning strategy, structure, staffing, programs, processes and platforms is essential. This is where a state-of-the-art PRM system can outshine any standard CRM platforms. Direct-to-partner lead distribution and management is typically purpose-built in PRM platforms, while CRMs need to be fully customized to fulfill this function

7. **Reporting** – Finally, as with any business system, in manufacturing it is very difficult to know where the business has been, where it is and where it is going without dynamic analytics. It is essential not only to automate various workflows, including distribution of digital content to partners, but also to have cross-application analytics to understand which partners are selling or not, and why or why not. This is where a state-of-the-art PRM system can make or break a PRM deployment, because analytics are crucial to drive business transformation and changes.

In addition to all the reasons I have already give, there is way in which PRM systems can make a significant difference by integrating direct and indirect sales motions. Logically, we all know having one system that can do it all is better than trying to patch together multiple systems. While I have already pointed out there are business cases where a dedicated CRM system is necessary—e.g., where the direct sales motions greatly vary from channel sales motion, and is also quite complex—in general, if there isn't a lot of difference between direct and indirect sales motion then a Unified Channel Management (UCM) platform would be is a much better solution. A leading UCM solution like ZINFI's platform would not only meet the need for a standard PRM system, but also bring in other capabilities, such as direct marketing and selling automation, for direct sales.

Today, there is no other system in the marketplace that can address both, but in many cases where the direct sales and indirect sales motion is pretty much the same, it makes a lot of sense to unify all sales activity into one platform that has fully integrated CRM and PRM. This is the advantage of a system like ZINFI's UCM platform. It also dramatically streamlines automated (digital) marketing activities, whereby the direct marketing team can drive leads leveraging the marketing module, but then distribute them via a CRM-PRM workflow to the partner base, and then have partners nurture and close using various other marketing and sales applications from the PRM system. This is truly the holy grail of end-to-end marketing and selling automation. The great news is that it is highly achievable today.

8 How to Select a PRM Software Vendor

Many organizations selling through the channel today are trying to determine how best to automate their Partner Relationship Management (PRM) process. In order to do so, quite a few are getting online and searching for "PRM software." When you do so, multiple vendors pop up. How do you distinguish among them? And how do you select a PRM software vendor that can satisfy your needs? In this chapter, we will explore in an objective way five key capabilities that PRM vendors must provide in order to meet the needs of most organizations.

1. **Flexibility, localization and scalability:** When you think carefully about PRM software and what it is supposed to do, you realize its main purpose is to truly automate the PRM process end-to-end. True PRM automation not only brings a structured approach to partner recruitment, partner engagement, partner enablement and partner management, but it also offers visibility and scalability on a global level. A company that automates PRM processes should be able to deploy a common set of programs globally and execute them locally in each country using local languages. An organization that's selling through the channel needs to be able to meet the unique requirements of each country where it operates. While much of the time partner programs are consistent across all countries, it's important to remember there is a degree of variability among different geographies. Therefore, any organization selling through the channel on a global scale needs to be certain its PRM vendor can offer flexibility, localization and scalability across multiple markets.
2. **Modularity:** Most organizations selling through the channel today have some level of existing infrastructure in place. Very rarely would a company find it desirable or practical to rip out and replace everything they have in place. As a result, the PRM software vendor must be able to provide a modular architecture whereby an organization can pick and choose which PRM software modules they want to deploy, and decide which they will configure first and then turn on successively. Modularity is a key capability for a PRM software vendor.
3. **Partner Marketing Management capabilities:** While most PRM software vendors provide some sort of functionality for partner records management, business planning, contract management, training management and incentives management, almost none — except ZINFI — provides

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full integration of partner management capabilities. Why is this important? Once you manage "market to" activities such as partner recruitment and partner engagement, which are focused primarily on training, and partner management, which is organized around partner incentives, you eventually need to turn your focus on enabling partners to drive leads and build pipelines on their own. Partner Marketing Management is a natural extension of PRM that completes the Partner Relationship Management framework. Therefore, a PRM software vendor must be able either to successfully integrate with an existing partner marketing tool or provide additional feature sets with incremental cost to turn on multi-partner demand generation capabilities.

4. **Multi-tenant architecture:** While most PRM software vendors provide a basic framework for multiple PRM modules and partner records management, very few provide a complete, CRM-like capability which allows not only the channel management folks from the organization—e.g., a channel account manager or a business manager—to manage the partners, but also provides a structure that can be deployed on the partner side—by, for example, a partner marketing manager or a partner sales rep—opening up access to the information in a seamless way within the PRM software. Almost no vendors today provide this specific capability. A company can spend millions of dollars configuring their CRM infrastructure to do this, but a state-of-art PRM software vendor like ZINFI can provide this capability right out of the box.
5. **Dynamic reporting engine:** While automation is the core objective of a PRM software platform, it must also provide a dynamic analytical engine that allows the organization to clearly understand and continuously monitor where investments are being made, which partners are productive, what programs are working, what activities have been completed, and what projects are coming up and moving forward. Without a comprehensive analytical dashboard and a reporting engine, a PRM software platform will never realize its full potential. That's why it's absolutely essential that the PRM software vendor can offer a reporting engine that is robust and dynamic, and able to produce custom reports on the fly.

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The channel is an incredible asset. Companies that are selling indirectly to businesses or consumers need to ensure they have complete visibility into their partner's productivity across the entire partner lifecycle they are trying to manage. PRM is managed via four critical steps—partner recruitment, partner engagement, partner enablement and partner management— but without an end-to-end, integrated and modular PRM software platform, no organization can successfully harness the power of their channel. Organizations that wish to automate their PRM process should look for the five capabilities mentioned above. In addition, they should make sure the PRM software vendor they choose is global in its reach, can demonstrate robust financials, has deployed similar-scenario systems with multiple existing clients and can dynamically adapt and configure the platform to address a specific set of needs.

9 Why a Lead Management System Is Critical for Channel Sales

Most vendors spend millions of dollars in generating end user awareness and inbound leads. However, very few have systems in place for getting those leads effectively to channel partners. Instead, many of those leads tend to be pursued by inside sales teams, but lack of an integrated channel lead management system substantially reduces marketing ROI.

At ZINFI, we regularly do channel partner satisfaction surveys and ask them how vendors can help them grow their businesses. The number one item on the list is distribution of good leads to partner sales reps. What we've found is that, even where leads are forwarded to top tier partners, very rarely do they have a structured system in place where leads are distributed, nurtured, qualified, tracked and closed. However, a good Channel Marketing Automation platform can significantly increase sales closures through a proper lead management system.

Before we delve into this topic, let's make sure we are clear what we mean by a lead management system. It is an automated, programmatic way of generating, allocating and tracking the performance of end user leads that have been provided to channel partners. Without an end-to-end automated platform, all this would be really hard to achieve. A state of the art lead management system should have a few core components:

1. **Prospect Records Management:** Since most lead management systems need to connect to a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platform, it is essential that the prospect records management system is built upon a CRM-like structure. This greatly enhances data flow between the lead management system as well as other CRM platforms on the vendor or partner side.
2. **Records Life Cycle Management:** Once leads have been distributed to partner's sales team, it should be possible to move the record through various sales cycles and track progress from stage to stage. Vendors should be able to log

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into the platform to check the progress of each record and the overall status of the pipeline. The partner should be able to record events like converting a prospect to a contact and adding opportunities to create a pipeline forecast.

3. **Lead Distribution and Withdrawal:** This is a critical feature for vendors, first of all to make sure a set of leads can be given to a set of partners, but also, if partners are not following up after a certain time, to be able to withdraw the leads back into the Prospect Records Management system for redistribution to other partners.
4. **Lead Distribution Rule Set:** A vendor should be able to push leads manually or automatically to a set of partners based on the lead type (SMB, Mid-Market, Enterprise, or other categorization) and also to match partner competencies, locations, and so on. This ability to create rule sets adds an important layer of automation to lead distribution, which gets the leads to partner team as soon as they are generated.
5. **Account Protection:** Certain end user accounts are managed by large or premier partners and a vendor may want to protect these accounts. The lead management system has to be able to protect one or multiple accounts and automatically push leads from those accounts to specific partners and sales people. On the other hand, if a vendor wants to have partners compete for certain accounts, they should be able to keep these leads as open records.
6. **Rewards Integration:** By integrating proper rewards and incentives, a vendor can greatly drive partner engagement and status reporting. We all know sales reps are busy and they have their own preferred CRM systems. However, a proper incentive structure around reporting can substantially enhance a vendor's ability to track lead status, by using sales rewards to motivate individuals to enter lead status details into the platform – either manually or by automatic synchronization by connecting their CRM accounts to the lead management system.
7. **Dynamic Reporting:** A state of the art lead management system should be able to provide dynamic reporting to both partners and vendors, so that lead and pipeline status can be tracked at multiple levels. Since selling is a competitive sport, the ability to share stack ranking among individual partner reps also drives better participation and adoption of channel programs.

While such a long list of requirements may be daunting to anyone considering a lead management system, a robust Channel Marketing Automation platform such as ZINFI's Partner Relationship Management (PRM) platform can not only facilitate lead distribution, but also substantially increase ROI.

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10 "Must Haves" for Your PRM Software to Increase Partner Engagement

Partner relationship management (PRM) is an important set of activities in channel management. Over the past decade, multiple SaaS vendors like ZINFI have brought significant innovation to market in the PRM software segment to enable a vendor selling through the channel to automate partner relationship management activities. In this article we will explore some of the basic capabilities that your PRM software must have to give you a solid start.

When you think about channel management and selling through a partner base, one of the most important factors is keeping partners informed and involved in your company's programs and activities. Getting mind share from a channel partner is the first hurdle. The next hurdle is to generate interest and engagement—ideally, leading to a transaction. This is where a start-of-the-art partner portal is essential. Your PRM software should come with a set of core capabilities allowing you to set up a dynamic partner portal.
With that in mind, here are the key criteria that your PRM software must satisfy to make sure the partner portal you set up will address all of the core requirements:

1. **Personalized access:** It's very important to make sure the content and application modules (such as incentives, planning, marketing and sales) that you provide to partners are highly focused and personalized to specific partner types or characteristics, including partner tier, specialization, geographical location, and so on. This is a fundamental requirement for your PRM software—it must be able to link content to the partner profile.
2. **Mobile responsiveness:** Why is mobile responsiveness important? Because your partners are always on the move, and more than 50% of portal access is now achieved via mobile devices. Therefore, your PRM software must be able to provide mobile-responsive web content in an application user interface that is optimized for mobile devices.
3. **Personalized communication:** We've already mentioned the importance of personalized access to web content and

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application modules. Similarly, when engaged in outbound communication, you need to make sure all touches (email, calls, direct mails, campaigns, etc.) are highly personalized. For example, you don't want to be sending information or appeals to your silver partners that are actually relevant only to your gold partners. That's a waste of effort and resources, and will only frustrate your partners. That's why your PRM software must be set up to allow you to personalize communication.

4. **Localization:** One of the most important features of your PRM software should be to allow complete localization of applications, content and the user interface. In order for you to provide truly personalized and mobile-responsive access to your partners, you need to make sure that you can offer content and a seamless user experience in key languages other than English.
5. **Access and utilization tracking:** This is a critical requirement for your PRM software, allowing your sales and marketing team to figure out what programs and assets are working and what are not —and to track success metrics by various partners groups, types, locations, geographies, etc.

In other articles we have emphasized the need for your PRM software to provide several core applications—like partner onboarding, training, marketing and sales enablement, and incentives management. As you can see from the brief list above, it is also crucial that your PRM software can be customized to different partner types or profiles, with features like personalization, mobile access in a localized environment, and the ability to track asset and application utilization for your internal sales and marketing stakeholders.

Once you have the right applications and right capabilities in your PRM software, you can truly begin to automate your channel management activities end to end. We at ZINFI live and thrive by the creation and leadership of Unified Channel Management (UCM) capabilities. Our UCM platform has fully configurable PRM software which not only provides you with all of the right applications, but also gives you the ability to fully personalize and localize content and applications, provide them in a highly responsive way, and track everything that is working or not working in a dynamic fashion to truly drive partner engagement.

> *When you think about channel management and selling through a partner base, one of the most important factors is keeping partners informed and involved in your company's programs and activities. Getting mind share from a channel partner is the first hurdle. The next hurdle is to generate interest and engagement—ideally, leading to a transaction. This is where a start-of-the-art partner portal is essential.*

11 7 Reasons Why Your Partner Portal Is Not Used

The partner portal is possibly the single most important tool for a vendor selling through channel. While channel programs, policies and people are all very important ingredients for partner relationship management, in our digital world a properly built, state-of-the-art partner portal can make the difference between a successful channel program and one that fails. However, the majority of partner portals today never realize their full potential of serving the needs of the channel partners and enabling a vendor to scale its business globally. Why is that? Let's examine some of the primary reasons behind this failure.

1. **Portals are not localized:** Most companies that are selling globally today may have some localized web content, but typically the user interface of the partner portal is not localized. As a result, partners that are more comfortable doing business in English are absolutely fine, but in countries where English is a secondary language or where partners are simply not comfortable using English, those partners can be very hesitant to use the partner portal. At ZINFI, we have observed that localizing the portal consistently increases utilization by 30% to 40% on a worldwide basis.
2. **Lack of mobile responsiveness:** We know most partners are out and about seeing their customers. While some of the technical staff may be using the partner portal via the web on a desktop computer, most individuals at partner organizations today access the partner portal via a mobile application. Therefore, the partner portal needs to be—at the very least—mobile responsive. Ideally, vendors will provide a mobile app that delivers some core functionalities tied to things like partner onboarding, training, lead management, deal registration, incentives management and some basic reports. While the goal is not necessarily to replicate the entire partner portal in mobile form—an unrealistic and ultimately be overwhelming objective—there are several core features and functionality that it makes sense to deliver via a dedicated mobile app.
3. **Confusing content distribution:** A typical vendor that generates a few hundred million dollars in revenue selling through a partner base may carry anywhere from ten to several

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hundred product lines. Each product or solution is associated with specific content in the form of product data sheets, service sheets, pricing guidelines, competitive positioning, and so on. How is this content actually categorized, tagged and distributed? That's an incredibly important variable. Another crucial consideration is how new content within the partner portal is tagged and separated from older, less immediately relevant material. For example, if there's a new launch of a specific product or service, all of the content related to that should be promoted through the partner portal so it's easy for partners to find as soon as they log in, and is both web responsive and mobile responsive.

4. **Lack of robust search capabilities:** When partners come to your partner portal, they are already busy. They are carrying multiple product lines and are likely accessing multiple partner portals. When it comes to the partner portal, they do so with a specific purpose in mind. Our data shows that the number one reason a partner logs in to the partner portal is related to customer support: Either they're creating tickets or checking the status of their tickets because they want to monitor how they're doing in helping their customers. Other common reasons for logging in include learning about different products and services offered by the vendor, and accessing marketing and sales materials. In each of these scenarios, the partner is thinking of a specific purpose and a specific solution. The partner portal is rich with content, but if specific content is not easy to find via a quick keyword search, it defeats the purpose of having the content and the partners get frustrated and leave. That's why having great search capabilities within the partner portal is absolutely critical.
5. **Lack of training:** You may have a great partner portal, but if partners are not trained how to use it in the most effective way, then it becomes just another form of communication that remains underutilized. Vendors need to hold regular training sessions using some form of marketing concierge and actually walk partners through what's available in the partner portal, what's new and what's on the horizon. They should also make recordings of training sessions available in "bite size" chunks of two to three minutes each in a "Help" section or a "How to Use the Partner Portal Effectively" section. Without that content, partners may become lost and they won't know who to call. Without a marketing concierge infrastructure that offers training sessions and help videos, partners are left essentially to their own devices to figure out how to use the partner portal. Don't let that happen. Make bite-size videos available in every section of the portal (sales, marketing, etc.) that explain how to use that section. Teaching partners how to use the portal will drive up usage. It's that simple.
6. **Lack of a simplified program layout:** This is a very important consideration. If you're deriving most of your revenue from the channel, chances are you are recruiting new partners or recruiting existing partners into new programs. There is an area for that in your partner portal that focuses on onboarding. Or you may have partner training tied specifically to marketing, sales, incentives or technical products and services. The content that informs your partners about these different areas needs to be laid out in a simplified way so partners can quickly and easily access what they need. While most vendors spend large amounts of money on infrastructure and people to ensure the partner portal is properly supported and developed, many partner portals remain essentially an extension of a past in which partner-related functions were managed through a patchwork of multiple systems and programs. That kind of fragmentation inhibits usage of the portal. Vendors need to rethink the user experience and optimize how the programs they wish to promote are presented in the partner portal.
7. **Lack of program alignment:** Vendors typically offer a lot of programs tied to incentives. One of the most effective ways to drive partner program utilization is to promote specific programs—not just through emails or telemarketing aimed at end buyers, but by driving partners to specific parts of the partner portal, promoting those programs with incentives and providing related content right where they need it. For example, if you are running a specific campaign where a reseller can earn extra points or a sales rep can earn extra dollars, create a landing page that describes the campaign and the incentives offered, and make sure that training related to the solution you are promoting, as well any marketing programs and tools you are making available in conjunction with the solution, are visible from that landing page and easily accessible. Rigorous alignment of programs with content from various parts of the portal can drive up portal utilization substantially.

In summary, very few vendors actually take a formal, organized approach to driving utilization of the partner portal through strategic program usage and alignment. Don't forget, if you have a successful program, you can actually use that success, promoting it to increase partner engagement through your partner portal, but many vendors fail to take advantage of that opportunity. To do so successfully, however, user-centric considerations like localization, content layout, search functionality and mobile functionality all need to be carefully thought through. If you have a highly compelling solution that partners love to sell, or you've recently launched a new product line or you've just required a hot company, by all means promote that through your partner portal. But be careful you don't use that opportunity just to promote the portal or the product being promoted; instead, use it as a vehicle to get your partners trained on the portal. Having an integrated, strategic approach to driving partner engagement through the partner portal can significantly increase utilization across your entire partner base, and also drive your profitable revenue growth forward.

12 Future Trends for Partner Portal Software

If you are selling through the channel, it is probably safe to assume that you have a partner portal. There's nothing ground-breaking about that. However, this is 2016. Do you know when your partner portal was built and with what technologies? Why does it matter? Well, do you still use a typewriter? I doubt it—typewriters are obsolete. So why would anyone want to use a partner portal built on obsolete software? I'll have more to say on that later, but before we get into the weeds here, let's step back for a second and look at the history of partner portals and how they have been built over the years.

Past (1985 to 2000)

If you were selling through the channel in 1990s, chances are you had an extranet whose purpose was to provide your partners with access to price lists, datasheets, collateral, etc. so that they wouldn't have to wait for printed materials to arrive. The partner portal software was very basic. Actually, it was essentially a website with external login capabilities connected with some sort of a directory systems that mapped users. That's about it.
Now, during this phase a few companies like Channelware (which actually coined the term "partner relationship management"), Channel Wave and Blue Roads raised millions of dollars in funding to create more sophisticated and functional portals, but they eventually went out of business due to lack of business adoption, lack of complete solution sets, high prices, complicated deployment and a lack of a full web services infrastructure. So despite the fact that several organizations had the right idea, the market was not ready for widespread adoption—or one could argue these companies couldn't supply what the market needed at that point with their versions of a partner portal software solution.

Present (2000 – 2015)

Most companies who started in the late 1990s to build and develop partner portal software were not successful and shut down by early to mid-2000s. However, with the explosion of Internet-related businesses in the dot-com boom and the proliferation of enterprise application companies, point solution products tied to incentives management, rewards, rebates, etc. started to evolve. Companies selling through the channel realized that they could use their customer relationship management (CRM) platform to

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automate some of the workflow as well. So naturally, due to lack of any integrated end-to-end solutions, companies started to patch together partner portal software of various types.

However, this patchwork of discrete point solutions created complexity, made the partner experience less than desirable, and made the total cost of ownership unbearable for organizations selling through the channel. Also, due to long buying cycles—and given the past failures of other vendors—very few new vendors for partner portal software entered the marketplace. Most players in the partner portal software space today are left over from the second wave of patched-up solutions and very few have a truly complete vision of what the future of partner portal software will look like.

Future (2015-2030)

Nils Bohr, a Nobel laureate in physics, was once quoted as saying, "Prediction is very difficult, especially if it's about the future." Well, we have also heard that the best way to predict the future is to create it. So I'd like to talk about what we at ZINFI believe about the future of partner portal software and what we are doing to create that future. We believe the future of partner portal software requires seven MAGICAL elements. The partner portal software of the future will be...:

- **Modular:** That's because enterprises are not going to rip and replace their entire infrastructure, and because there will be very few companies who can compete without a fully end-to-end automation platform in place.
- **Adaptive:** As companies turn on different modules of the partner portal software, these modules have to fit into an existing infrastructure and have to adapt to data flows on both PC and mobile platforms.
- **Global:** Whatever partner portal software is selected for deployment, it will necessarily have to accommodate a global infrastructure, including things like European data privacy laws and the regulations of various countries.
- **Intelligent:** The customer will need to be able to learn more about what works and doesn't work in their channel management approach by understanding and analyzing the intelligence that is provided by the analytical engine of the partner portal software.
- **Comprehensive:** Eventually, when all of the modules are turned on, the software will automate the entire channel marketing process from end to end, and it will manage the process through a unified, integrated approach.
- **Affordable:** Of course these deployments will have to be priced competitively, and it will also have to be possible for growing enterprises to deploy cost-effectively. Therefore, the total cost of ownership will have to be clearly visible and the return on investment must arrive within a few months instead of years.
- **Localized:** Because deployment is comprehensive and global, it is essential that the entire experience be localized in multiple languages—not only to make it easy for vendors to do business with partners but also to make sure that portal content is relevant and responsive.

When it comes to partner portal software, the good news is that there are a few companies like ZINFI who have already been working towards this vision for some time now. We at ZINFI have taken the lead in defining the category of Unified Channel Management, and the unified approach can be truly MAGICAL.

13 Why Channel Partners Don't Use Market Development Funds (MDF)

Most vendors that are selling through the channel depend on their partners to generate demand instead of just relying on leads generated by the vendors. However, the sad reality is that the channel often remains as a fulfillment arm. Despite heavy investments that many vendors have made in channel marketing—particularly in automation and concierge services—most partners do not use marketing development funds (MDF). In fact, our worldwide channel survey data shows as much as 60% of market development funds (MDF) are not used on a quarterly basis. In this article we explore the key reasons why.

Before we delve into the issues, however, let's spend a few minutes on the 40% of the cases where market development funds are claimed and used. In the majority of these cases, the funds are used by large partners who know how to navigate the MDF approval process and have a much larger bucket of funds. These tend to be large channel partners who have deep relationships with the vendors and have competencies in place to market, sell and fulfill demand. Also, these large channel partners usually have dedicated marketing resources in place to apply for funds and utilize them properly. While corruption tied to misuse of market development funds remains a major issue in the channel, with proper auditing and personnel management organizations can ensure that funds are being used appropriately. This part is not easy, but is highly necessary.

Now let's take a look at the 60% of the cases where funds are not being claimed or used. Why is this the case? Market development funds (MDF) are available primarily for partners who have achieved a certain level of sales output. And this assumes that such partners have developed specific competencies in selling products and services for which market development funds (MDF) have been provided. However, as we noted earlier, most of the time these funds remain unused. Based on our research we have discovered a set of core barriers that prevent market development funds (MDF) from being claimed and used.

1. **Partners are not focused on selling vendors' products.** Most of the time partners sell a vendor's product as an alternative to the core solution or as an add-on. This scenario

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is quite common in banking, insurance, finance, technology and many other sectors where partners (agents, resellers, brokers, etc.) typically represent multiple vendors in order to provide choices to their client base. This lack of primary engagement leads to partners focusing on marketing the primary solution, but skipping any marketing activities for the add-ons as a standalone initiative. In most of these cases, partners do not apply or claim for market development funds (MDF).

2. **Partners tend to focus on the short term.** Most channel partners who generate less than $5 million to $10 million in annual revenue and lack dedicated marketing resources tend to focus their business activities on quarterly intervals. However, we know that effective marketing is not just about running events; it's about putting together a comprehensive, 360-degree approach tied to inbound and outbound activities over the long term. The focus on quarterly initiatives can cause partners to bypass a structured approach to marketing, thus failing to apply for market development funds (MDF).
3. **Partners do not have digital marketing expertise.** Marketing has changed dramatically during the past 10 years and even more so over the past five years. In the past, B2B marketing relied heavily on telemarketing and lead generation, and B2C marketing depended heavily on advertising. However, both marketing approaches have changed—primarily due to the evolution of social media, content marketing and social selling activities. In spite of the changes, most partners are not equipped properly with the appropriate tools and techniques to exploit the advantages of digital marketing. Instead, many partners tend to rely on old techniques, like telemarketing and running events, and overlook the value of using market development funds (MDF).
4. **Partners do not have marketing resources.** It's a well-known secret that most channel partners do not have dedicated marketing resources; that's one reason why they are sometimes called resellers vs. remarketers. As a result, most channel partners are not aware of market development funds (MDF) requirements, don't know how to apply for them and end up not using them even when they are available.
5. **Vendors do not provide marketing tools and concierge services.** While the first four barriers have been tied to partners' business models and competencies, this last barrier relates directly to vendors' shortcomings. Many vendors are reluctant to invest in a marketing automation platform that works for channel partners and offer marketing concierge services. It is essential today to give channel partners pre-configured campaigns that are pre-loaded in a channel marketing automation platform. However, that alone is not enough. Since many partners do not have dedicated marketing resources, it is also essential to provide marketing

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concierge services (for free) in "bite sizes" to those partners who are trying to grow their business but struggling due to lack of internal marketing resources.

As you can see, there is no lack of reasons why a significant portion of vendors' market development funds (MDF) go unused every quarter. Vendors can address this problem by taking four key steps:

1. **Focus on partners who are using funds.** It is essential to provide partners who are engaged and know how to apply for funds and get paid with dedicated marketing services agency capabilities so that partners can quickly apply for funds and execute campaigns that are aligned with the vendor's business objectives. This step can add deep value to channel partners.
2. **Eliminate channel corruption.** While this seems like an obvious point in today's business environment, companies still tend to shy away from addressing this issue. In fact, they often know which partners are misusing funds but don't want to ruffle any feathers. Unfortunately, in some case channel management is also involved in the misuse of funds. This is where regional or corporate management needs to step in and clean up the system by bringing in transparency, weeding out corrupt people and partners, and engaging in a public discussion about why it is essential to use funds properly.
3. **Provide channel marketing automation.** We have discussed earlier that campaigns need to be pre-loaded into a channel marketing automation platform so partners can quickly search for, select and execute campaigns. The platform needs to be robust enough to provide content in local languages, and it should make it easy for assets to be customized, co-branded and downloaded for execution. Furthermore, the platform should provide native execution capability, so that partners who want to launch a campaign should be able to do so themselves directly from the platform. We have seen a consistent pattern in which, once a robust platform has been adopted, the pick-up rate for market development funds (MDF) goes up substantially.
4. **Provide marketing concierge services.** Since many partners do not have dedicated marketing resources, they need to be supported by dedicated concierge services—in much the same way direct sales forces need support from marketing teams and indirect sales forces (AKA the channel). While we have written a lot on this topic, there is much more that needs to be discussed. However, the primary focus of concierge services should be in understanding the partner's business and recommending what will truly work for them. Once this relationship has been established, utilization of market development funds (MDF) will go up.

As you can see, it can be hard to get partners to use market development funds (MDF), but if vendors provide the proper structure and focus this can be achieved. However, channel corruption associated with fund management must first be addressed by senior management. Vendors who have a clear business objective and purpose and have proper resources and channel marketing automation in place are not only likely to see fund utilization rise, but they will also find the return on their channel marketing investments can scale up quite substantially.

> *"Despite heavy investments that many vendors have made in channel marketing—particularly in automation and concierge services—most partners do not use marketing development funds (MDF). In fact, our worldwide channel survey data shows as much as 60% of market development funds (MDF) are not used on a quarterly basis."*

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14 What Can You Do to Drive Your Market Development Funds Utilization?

At ZINFI, we do a bi-annual worldwide channel survey across a broad range of channel partners and resellers to understand various opportunities related to marketing and sales activities. One of the core areas we ask questions are tied to Market Development Funds (MDF). The typical questions we ask are tied to how easy it is to apply, what partners want to do, etc. In one of our recent surveys we asked the partners who had access to Market Development Funds (MDF) about how frequently they use such funds. The answer was not at all surprising.

As a part of this survey we reached out to about 4,000 partner contacts on a world-wide basis and asked whether they have Market Development Funds (MDF) or not. Those who said that they have MDF (which was about 30% of the total respondents) were then asked how frequently they use MDF. The attached graph shows, most partners do not use MDF. There are a few things a vendor can do to drive better utilization and return on marketing investment.

1. **Keeping it simple:** Very often there are too many criteria to be satisfied to be eligible for a Market Development Funds (MDF), which is a major turn off for partners to participate. So, keeping things simple and performance-focused helps to drive MDF adoption.
2. **Setting up the right program:** Once you have built a simplified MDF access process, the key is to identify a core set of programs that the partners could apply for, based on your sales objectives. While competency development (training, etc.) are top MDF usages, above and beyond that there are other things a vendor can do to select the right program.
3. **Contacting the right partner:** Once you have set up the right programs, it is essential that you do not do a broad communication and try to tell everything to everyone. You need to make sure that you have the right Partner Relationship Management (PRM) platform in place that allows you to send segmented messaging to the right

partner – based on their tier and competency profile to drive demand in a category.

4. **Contacting the right person:** Too often a vendor selling through a channel doesn't have the right marketing contacts at the partner organization. So communications related to various programs funded by Market Development Funds (MDF) tend to go to the wrong people or don't reach the target organization at all. It is essential to make sure that you have the right up-to-date marketing contact information from the partner organization you are targeting. You can do that by regularly scrubbing your partner contact database.
5. **Paying for performance only:** Be clear, be fair, but be tough in paying off for MDF claims that do not have clear proof of performance. Many times we see partners with no proof of performance submit claims and get paid because of their status or relationship. The word spreads pretty quickly and it's unfair to the partners who are working hard to drive results. So, be very selective on who you pay based on performance. Programs like Prospecting BlitzTM can drive tangible results across many partners, and also drive MDF utilization.
6. **Sharing success broadly:** Once you have reached the right partner contact with the right program and approved a plan to execute, sharing success from a program also drives adoption. Many horizontal programs – like training and certification, horizontal products, etc., that can scale globally drive success with clear and definite ROI.
7. **Rinse and repeat:** We say this a lot when it comes to Market Development Funds or Channel Programs because too often vendors get carried away in running new campaigns and miss out on the opportunity to scale on campaigns that have already worked. Therefore, make sure before you drop one and add another campaign, that your high performance programs have been fully utilized and scaled across as many targeted partners as possible. Too many is too much for the channel.

ZINFI's Partner Relationship Management (PRM) platform can provide you with a complete set of integrated tools to set up the right campaigns, select the right partner, market to them properly and drive engagement to execute. ZINFI can also help you with scrubbing your partner databases for multiple countries and coming up with the right marketing contacts. ZINFI is a global organization – currently supporting twenty-six countries and have partner database scrubbing capabilities in many countries.

> *"Very often there are too many criteria to be satisfied to be eligible for a Market Development Funds (MDF), which is a major turn off for partners to participate. So, keeping things simple and performance-focused helps to drive MDF adoption."*

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15 7 Market Development Funds Programs That Yield Results

We frequently see vendors and providers struggling to figure out what would be the right set of programs to use Market Development Funds (MDF) or Co-operative (Co-op) Marketing Funds effectively to drive value for their partners and agents, and also provide high level of marketing ROI. In fact, there are a few insights that make it easier to do the right things right.

Over the years we have seen organizations that can sell through a channel in almost a sure fire way and increase their return on investment from Market Development Funds (MDF) by focusing on a core few programs. These seven programs and ideas certainly do not rule out the opportunity to innovate in other ways, but a good approach would be to allocate more significant portion of your MDF budget across these areas first while setting aside the remainder as discretionary budget for other, creative marketing programs.

1. **Partner Training:** If you have a fee-paid certification program in place, one way to increasing return is to allow up to 80% reimbursement of strategic training programs. This can certainly vary quarter by quarter, as you emphasize certain business lines or product lines, but overall, running promotions to waive certification fees is a great way to increase competencies with your partner organization. It also helps create sales momentum as fully trained technicians can engage their internal sales resources to generate demand.
2. **Installed Base Sales:** Organizations with large number of end customers and a broad channel at times struggle to deploy Market Development Funds (MDF) to drive demand. However, the easiest way to drive near term return is to create upgrade promotions and add-on campaigns for your installed base. In this way, you enable your channel to drive focused campaigns. If you have the ability to track point-of-sales data from your sales organization or your channel teams (distribution, etc.), you can very quickly track return on investment from these programs.
3. **End User Webinars:** Webinars are the most cost effective way to generate demand – yet very few vendors effectively uses this mechanism. If you have the right Channel Marketing

Automation platform, you are better equipped to drive high levels of attendance to centralized webinars. The Channel Marketing Automation platform allows the vendor to present a centralized webinar, while partners are able to drive their existing base of customers and prospects to attend. Security settings mean they don't need to worry about losing those records to the vendor's sales team or other partners. Creating a regular webinar series where you present, but partners drive traffic and follow up to close can provide tangible ROI.

4. **Appointment Setting for SME and Enterprise Campaigns:** To get return from your tele-campaigns, the average selling price needs to be at least 20-30x of the program cost. You don't want to spend telemarketing or tele-prospecting budget on SMB campaigns, as the average transaction cost tends to be higher in mid-market and enterprise solutions. So, if your tele-campaign cost per partner varies from $2,000 to $10,000 (depending on the activities and countries where you are running the campaign) then you have to be able to close one or multiple deals in the $40,000 to $300,000 range. Therefore, handpicking the campaigns that you want to fund is critical to drive near term results.
5. **SMB Roadshows:** Allowing partners to run modestly funded lunch-and-learn events (20 people attending with $1,500 budget) can be quite effective. However, this doesn't work ROI-wise with transactional products – like firewalls, switches, etc. – that do not have a higher life cycle value. Picking the right products for SMB-focused roadshows is therefore critical, but with the right mix, this can certainly drive consistent deal flow and pipeline increase both for partners and providers.
6. **Social Selling:** The right Channel Marketing Automation platform can help your partners to sell socially. This has a low participation cost, but is much more effective than search engine marketing –AdWords or Organic SEO. Networks like Facebook, LinkedIn and Pinterest offer business-to-business social marketing activities. With an integrated approach these could be easily converted into actual sales activities leading to pipeline development. This may be an unfamiliar approach, but can be quickly implemented with the right Channel Marketing Automation platform.
7. **Marketing Automation:** While selecting the right programs is critical to generate ROI from Market Development Funds (MDF) activities, an equally if not even more important requirement is to have the right Partner Relationship Management platform to automate the entire MDF process and link to Demand Generation. In order to do this, an organization needs to implement a Partner Relationship Management Infrastructure, and also connect it to a Through Partner Marketing Automation platform. Once done, implementation of MDF programs become easy, predictable and ROI focused.

Vendors also provide demo hardware, software licenses and other tools via MDF for sales purposes, but in our experience it is really hard to track ROI from those activities. Reserving 60-70% of the budget for the seven activities mentioned above can increase your ROI substantially.

ZINFI's Partner Relationship Management (PRM) platform can provide you with a complete set of integrated Channel Marketing Automation platform. ZINFI's PRM platform comes with an easy to use, fully configurable Market Development Funds (MDF) management capabilities, which can support multiple currencies, exchange rates and local languages. Full integration with ZINFI's Market-Through Partner Marketing Automation capabilities allows end to end tracking of campaigns and results.

> *“Over the years we have seen organizations that can sell through a channel in almost a sure fire way and increase their return on investment from Market Development Funds (MDF) by focusing on a core few programs. These seven programs and ideas certainly do not rule out the opportunity to innovate in other ways, but a good approach would be to allocate more significant portion of your MDF budget across these areas first while setting aside the remainder as discretionary budget for other, creative marketing programs.”*

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16 Making Market Development Funds Work for You

There's a pot of gold waiting for IT solution providers – and technology vendors are almost uniformly frustrated in getting their channel to make use of it. Vendors who sell through a channel or an agent network allocate between 1 and 2% of their top line revenue as Market Development Funds for their partners. However, for the most part, these Market Development Funds (MDF) fail to realize their potential. There are many reasons, chief among which are the lack of organized ways to allocate funds, track activities and measure outcomes. As a result, MDF is notorious for yielding the worst return in comparison to other direct marketing activities. Through our years of engagement in channel programs around the world, we have observed that companies who take the following steps to get the highest return from their MDF programs.

1. **Understand where MDF will be relevant:** Vendor companies provide clear directives for their direct marketing teams that, in turn, should dictate how funds are allocated across business lines, product lines and activities. Some of these direct marketing budgets may be allocated for branding, with a portion also reserved for demand generation. This is an important dividing line. In a B2B environment, MDF initiatives focused on branding rarely produce good return, until and unless a large – possibly huge – amount of fund is allocated. The 'Intel Inside' campaign, which is based solely on generating brand awareness, is an example of the behemoth branding approach. On the other side of the line, focused demand generation activities with specific sales or lead generation goals and defined time windows are more likely to produce measurable results.
2. **Set a clear strategy:** Once you have determined where to allocate your funds, you need to determine where and how you want to drive return: marketers always need to begin with an end in mind. Identification of markets, business lines, products, customer types and partner capabilities are all critical elements. The majority of vendors open their MDF programs to all partners and offer a 50 to 80% reimbursement rate for approved activities – but often the funds are wasted in unproductive activities, or unused

because partners can't get beyond the planning stage. A better approach would be to pick a tightly defined solution or product set, focus on a market area, narrow the partner qualification criteria, and work within those boundaries with proven programs that you know will drive results.

3. **Stick to tried and tested campaigns:** Marketing is a blend of art and science, and new campaigns often need adjustment in the initial stages. The road to success takes experimentation with campaign targets, messaging, methods and offers. Since partners are invariably time-constrained and lack marketing resources, using the partner network to experiment with new campaigns and programs is a sure way to fail. Yes, there are exceptions, but if you want to ensure return, test new programs with your direct sales teams, and only then promote successful campaigns via your indirect channel.
4. **Set guidelines and reporting requirements:** We often see organizations allocate MDF, roll out programs, pay out on MDF claims and then move on to other initiatives without requiring partners to report back on activities and results. An effective MDF process requires a structured plan approval followed by an equally structured proof of perform and ROI reporting process. These must be enforced if the MDF program is to succeed. Channel account management team members need to have regular reviews with the partner base to make sure partners understand that they are not only responsible for driving execution, but also are on the hook for reporting results. Otherwise, you will not be able to track ROI.
5. **Deploy localized, automated tools:** We are all busy, but there is way to create more time: by strategically deploying Channel Marketing Automation tools to reduce workload and streamline tracking and reporting. Without an automated MDF management process, both vendors and partners end up spending an enormous amount of time via email, spreadsheet, phone calls, and meetings to approve a marketing plan, track results and pay out funds. This not only drains organizational effectiveness, but can also have a negative psychological impact on the partner, who will not be energized by a time-consuming planning and claim process.
6. **Promote success:** Once you have picked a clear strategy, defined programs, rolled them out to a group of partners and started to track results, get out the megaphone. It's important to aggressively promote successes across your partner base both locally and globally. Success breeds success, and never more so than in the channel.
7. **Do it again:** Marketers are creative by nature, and always challenged to try something new. However, before you switch horses, make sure your campaigns and programs have really run out of their potential. If a campaign is still working, let it roll. Developing a successful campaign through the channel takes at least six months – three months to ramp and roll out, and another three months to execute and track. Many marketing programs, including MDF-funded programs, run successfully year after year. So, before you give up and move on, make sure that a change is warranted and that you're not killing the goose that lays the golden egg.

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> *MDF is notorious for yielding the worst return in comparison to other direct marketing activities. Through our years of engagement in channel programs around the world.*

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17 Why PRM Software Needs To Have Great Incentives Management Capabilities

Over the last decade or so, a new category of software called Partner Relationship Management software or PRM software has been evolving rapidly. What's the primary driver behind this evolution? Organizations are recognizing the need to build a direct sales force that can increase their reach and drive sales at a lower cost. In this chapter, we will explore how to effectively manage incentives programs that are designed to enhance partner behavior and performance. As part of that discussion, we'll examine the core requirements and capabilities of PRM software in more detail. But before we begin to specifically address incentives management, let's talk a bit how the complexity of channel management affects incentives programs.

At a high level, when a company is selling through an indirect reseller channel or a franchise network in multiple cities or even countries around the world, it will likely have to deal with various types of partners who sell into different segments and verticals, and these partners may have different sales philosophies. Some may sell a lot, some may sell a little and some are in between. Different organizations may have different sales requirements. Most importantly, the sales programs may also be changing on a quarterly basis. As an organization introduces new products, and as it acquires new companies and capabilities, it may have to drive sales by launching new programs designed to change behaviors and by offering rewards for specific behaviors. Just as employee incentives are critical in driving performance within an organization, partner incentives are an essential element in driving the performance of partners.

There are basically three types of incentives programs that companies need to manage:

1. **Market development funds (MDF):** These are funds that are given to a partner—usually based on their sales volume— to engage in additional marketing activities to generate demand.

2. **Rebates:** These are provided when a partner's sales exceed a specified level: the higher the level of sales, the larger the rebate and the better the partner's margin.
3. **Sales rewards:** These are typically given to individuals who achieve large sales volumes. The goal with these rewards is to ensure that each sales rep or technical rep is financially incentivized to drive adoption of certain products and solutions.

Interestingly, most vendors today still manage these incentives using email or Excel files or other types of general-purpose tools, and they lack an automated infrastructure to drive the process. Because these tools are not integrated and not designed specifically for handling partner relationships, managing and measuring the ROI from incentives programs is a major challenge for many organizations—and that's where PRM software can make a significant difference.

How can PRM software solve this problem? It allows a vendor to significantly streamline activities associated with people, processes, programs and automation.

Programs: Channel programs tend to fall into the categories we discussed earlier: MDF, rebates and sales rewards. For these programs to be effective, they need to be closely aligned with sales and marketing objectives. For example, when a company launches a specific product, it may want to provide incentives of various types or levels simultaneously. They may offer development funds to a specific group of partners who are most capable of selling those products. In addition to MDF, they may give rebates to partners that sell at a certain level. They might also offer sale rewards to reps, who will likely have to learn how to sell a new product and may be motivated by financial incentives to do so. When managing incentives at these various levels, alignment of various programs is critical. That's where PRM software comes in, giving vendors an easy way to quickly set up an incentives program, track it over time and improve it.

People: When we talk about incentives, we are not just talking about partners. Incentives may also be provided for internal sales people, channel account managers, distribution managers and other people from within the organization who are supporting a partner in their efforts to sell something new or sell specified products. In that case, an incentives management system should allow the vendor to set up sales incentives and track performance, not just for external entities like their channel partners, but also for their own internal personnel. Again, PRM software can help significantly.

Processes: When a channel program needs to be set up, typically it is done manually. Perhaps a campaign site is created, an email goes out and sales people may be given scripts to use as they reach out to educate partners. Good PRM software will allow you to easily automate and streamline these processes. For example, vendors can use the software to set up microsites with different channel programs and incentives programs, and it can accommodate strategies to drive these programs via sales kits and other sales enablement tools in an efficient, compact way. Once programs have been launched, PRM software can provide tracking tools to monitor adoption rates at a detailed level. How many partners are engaging in a specific program? How many have signed up for additional training? Have they set up demos of products and services? How effective are the programs in terms of sales? All of this can be measured and tracked over time so that organizations can see which programs are most effective.

Automation: When the goal is to streamline the management of incentives via programs, people and processes, automation is what makes it all happen. Automation can be a huge help to vendors who wish to track their relationships with their partner base in an integrated and efficient way. Automation allows them to run incentives programs across multiple countries, various types of partners, different segments and verticals, and organizations with different sales philosophies and changing sales requirements. With PRM software, companies can automate and keep track of these diverse and dynamic elements in a single online interface, thus reducing the labor costs involved in managing multiple programs simultaneously on the vendor side, as well as increasing the effectiveness of the programs and boosting ROI. The vendor can see at a glance which programs are working well and which are not, and then decide which programs to drop or continue.

These are just a few of the ways in which PRM software can significantly help vendors manage their incentives programs.

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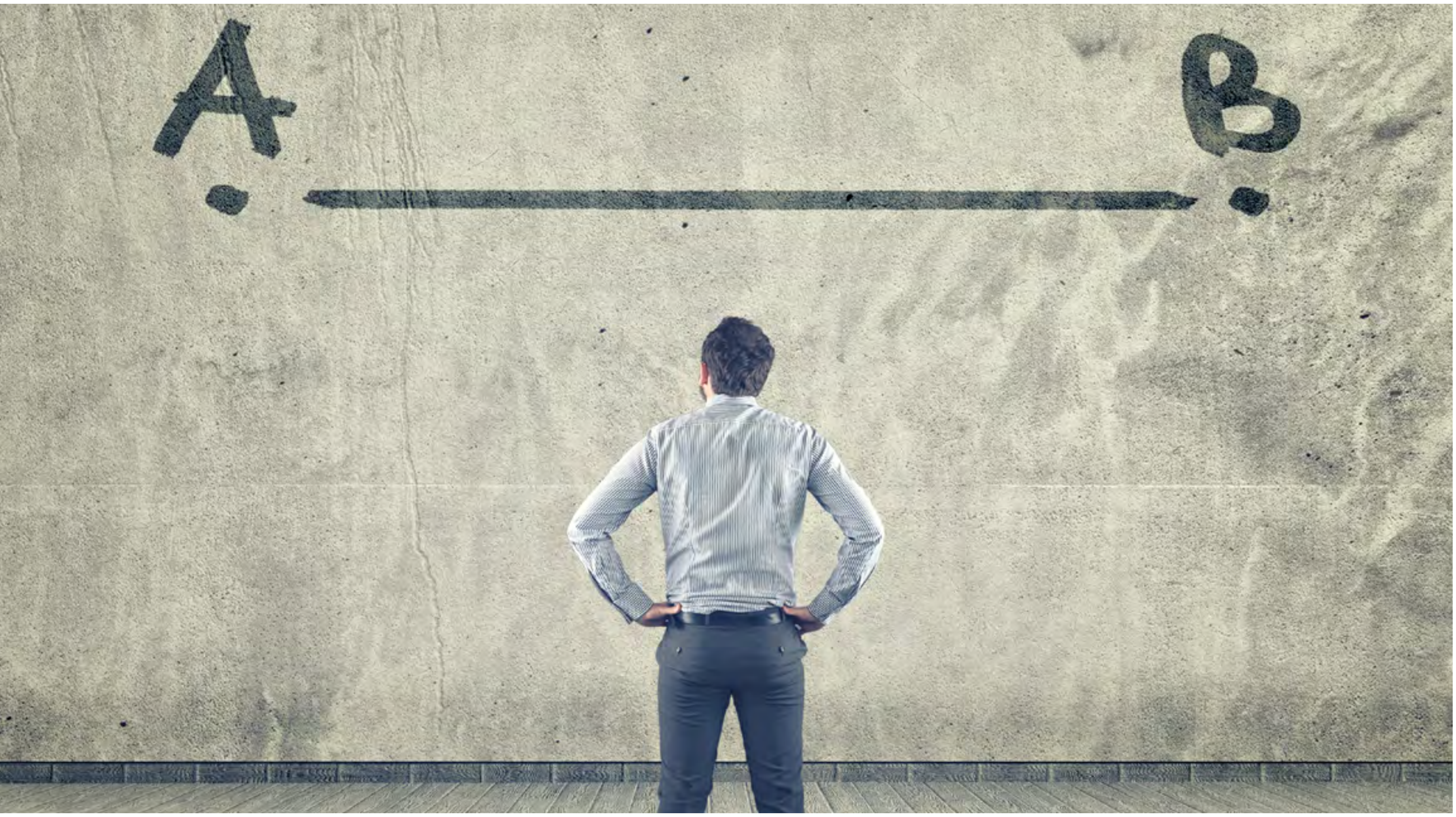
18 7 Challenges of Channel Management

Channel management is complex primarily because of what it tries to manage. The word “management” implies some level of control to achieve performance from an individual or from a team, either through inspiration or through some level of enforcement. The meaning of “management” varies greatly when it comes to an organization’s structure—depending on whether it’s a startup, a more mature company or a governmental organization like the military. However, in every one of those instances there is a direct relationship between the manager and the subordinate or employee or team member. In the case of a reseller network or a partner network, that relationship is very different, and it presents some unique challenges. Let’s take a moment to explore those challenges.

1. **Channel partners are companies, not people.** Ordinarily when we talk about management, where there is some level of control over employees or consultants or contractors, we are exerting some level of control over people. But when we talk about managing a channel, the level of control is much lower: first of all because it’s an indirect sales force and, second, as I’ve already noted, we’re managing companies, not people. Of course those companies are made up of people—sales people, technical people, marketing people—but in the end we’re trying to manage an entity rather than individuals. That’s an important difference that creates a huge amount of complexity.
2. **Channel partners do not report to vendors.** In the case of a direct sales force, there is a hierarchy. You have a manager who reports to a director who may report to a VP, but with a channel organization, you have a company reporting to a channel account manager or a partner business manager. That reporting relationship is indirect. If some partners don’t perform over one or two or three quarters, they don’t get fired for missing their mark. They may miss some incentives, but they don’t get fired for poor performance. Eventually, if a partner doesn’t perform over a long period of time, that partner may be replaced, but it doesn’t happen as quickly as it would when you’re managing a direct sales force.
3. **Channel partners have their own priorities.** The challenge here is that those priorities do not necessarily align with the priorities of a vendor. If a vendor is trying to promote a specific product or trying to penetrate a specific market—say, verticals like manufacturing or healthcare or whatever–it may or may not be in the interest of the partner to carry out those

activities. So it's crucial for the organization to understand what the priorities of those partners are instead of randomly pushing programs and deploying resources.

4. **There are different types of partners, and they require different engagement models.** Some partners sell to small and medium-size businesses (SMBs), some partners sell to midmarket organizations, some sell to enterprises and some sell to all or a combination of two or more segments. For an organization to align behind the needs of various types of partners, have appropriate programs and make them meaningful requires a significant level of thinking and homework which, a lot of times, companies skip. Therefore, many of the initiatives that are rolled out in the channel don't really have an impact. In addition to differences in types of partners—what we might call practices or areas of focus—there are also differences in relationship based on revenue. Partners who are larger—larger in the sense that they carry a bigger portion of a vendor's revenue—tend to more important to the vendors than those partners who don't carry a lot of products. Aligning the appropriate level of resources with high-velocity and high-volume partners vs. low-velocity, low-volume partners is critical, and that can make channel management quite complex.
5. **A partner's loyalty is driven by financial motives.** Just like in a startup environment, where people may be partly motivated by a belief in a cause or inspiration but are ultimately driven by the prospect of financial gain, most of the time the relationship between a partner and a vendor is fundamentally driven by financial gain. If the path toward that financial gain is not clearly defined, it can cause a lot of friction. Similarly, if the expectations change or are realigned with respect to an initiative, that can create complexity.
6. **Partner success depends on their competencies in an ecosystem.** Very rarely does a partner—especially in the technology or solution domain—sell only one product. So, for example, if a partner is selling to the construction industry or the technology sector or manufacturing or other areas of high tech, that partner may carry two, three, four or as many as 50 different vendors. A partner's competencies play a big role in determining its interest in a specific set of solutions. Understanding that and aligning behind those competencies is critical for success. One last point: While many companies have alliance programs, and they tend to apply them to solution selling, they do not apply much to franchise or retail businesses. Therefore, if an organization is addressing those types of markets, the level of complexity can be quite high.
7. **Forecasting is very hard when it comes to run rate and large-deal businesses.** One of the major challenges in channel marketing is developing forecasts, especially if a company is growing. In cases where there is a revenue business, and the revenue doesn't change much from quarter to quarter—which may the typical scenario with retail and franchises—it's



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relatively easy to predict within a few percentage points what the demand is going to be. However, if the economy is in distress, or certain product categories are growing faster, one of the big challenges is to work with the partner base and come up with a forecasting model. This is where understanding various types of partners, their own sales velocity and the mix behind that velocity is critical. Without proper systems and processes in place, it is incredibly difficult for vendors to come up with these forecasts

These seven major channel management challenges are common across every type of channel. Of course, there are other types of challenges that may be very specific to a market segment or a country. However, if these seven challenges are not addressed consistently in each market in which a vendor participates, the maturity of the channel and the realization of the potential may vary greatly.

So let's talk a bit about the solutions for overcoming these challenges when it comes to channel management.

1. **A structured channel program.** Every company needs a structured channel program. It may not be a single program but a set of programs aligned behind different types of partners—by their verticals, their competencies, by their sales mix, by their location: different strokes for different folks. Thinking that through in a systematic way can reduce a lot of waste and frustrations for both parties involved as you try to grow your business.
2. **Ease of doing business – doing less to get more done via channel.** Ease of doing business comes up as a major factor when it comes to channel management on both the partner side and the vendor side. Often the account manager ends up spending an enormous amount of time fielding emails, phone calls, etc. from partners. That problem can be addressed through a proper structure. That may mean sales concierges or partner marketing concierges, or it can be a combination of inside, outside and field support, but thinking through that structure and optimizing the productivity of the organization is critical. Many times when smaller organizations get acquired by larger ones, by default the larger organization tends to roll the acquired organization into their existing structure, and even though on the surface this integration may make sense, in reality a lot of the supporting infrastructure that was actually working and making the smaller entity successful falls apart. This is why a lot of acquisitions that occur in the technology space don't realize their potential, because when it comes to ease of doing business, that structure gets changed dramatically.
3. **Systems for partner relationship management and partner marketing management.** While enterprise resource automation—as well as sales force automation and more recently marketing automation—has been around for a while, very few companies have deployed structured systems when it comes to partner relationship management and partner marketing management. With a little bit of investment and struture in this area, a company can realize significant returns and reduce labor costs, increase ease of doing business and create a structure around their channel programs. This leads to my fourth point:
4. **Program alignment – training, product promotions, incentives.** When we think about partner training, product promotions, incentives related to rewards, rebates, market development funds and so on, it is very important to think through these programs in a systematic way. Throwing out a bunch of incentives just for the sake of doing it—we see it all the time: $100 rewards for certain activities, $1,000 prizes, opportunities to win an iPad—really doesn't make a lot of sense for partners. That's because, fundamentally, if the incentives are not aligned with selling a product or service, they will not go the extra mile for the sake for winning an iPad or whatever. But when programs are aligned and a channel is performing, it's a different story, which leads to my last solution:
5. **Celebrate success – make it fun.** Many vendors do have annual partner conferences where they award a premier partner or two or perhaps more across certain categories. That is incredibly important, and it's quite common. But it's not enough. For a channel to maintain its energy and its direction and its commitment, it needs continuous management through celebration of success. Sales is a competitive sport. Making it fun, making it relevant and allowing the partners—especially when it comes to the individual (sales reps, marketing folks, technical people)—celebrating success by sharing good news, by touting the fact they have done something tangible for a specific vendor by posting on social media or through other channels, can have a profound impact and create excitement.

As we have seen, while channel management has the potential to be complex, when it is done right it becomes a huge competency. That's why companies strive towards building a channel network that can really help them increase their reach, reduce their costs, increase productivity, provide better support to the end customer and therefore increase satisfaction rates, and create a powerful "stickiness" through distribution. That may prevent competitors from attaining the same level of sales velocity and mix.

19 Why Partner Relationship Management (PRM) Fails Most of the Time

Over the past few years there has been a lot of excitement about partner relationship management (PRM) process development and automation. However, this segment hasn't really grown as fast as the marketing automation platform (MAP) or customer relationship management (CRM) segments. What is holding back the growth in deployment of partner relationship management (PRM) automation? Here are some key factors that present barriers to deployment and are frequent causes of failure:

1. **Short-term focus.** Most channel organizations are busy managing activities by the quarter, and typically very few dollars are invested in mapping channel processes that require redesign and redevelopment to build out a state-of-the-art partner relationship management (PRM) infrastructure. The channel is a great way to go to market, but when the market changes (as it inevitably does) and organizations fail to remap their channel infrastructure accordingly, they struggle to stay relevant. We have seen this repeatedly over the years across multiple Fortune 1000 customers. Those who are adaptive and constantly redesigning their channel—not just quarterly, but whenever necessary and in anticipation of opportunities — tend to outperform those who are chasing market evolution.
2. **Inadequate resources.** It is one thing to remap a go-to-market model—e.g., by adding an OEM channel to sell via OEMs or adding franchises to increase reach—but without significant investment and patience these activities really doesn't produce results. As a result, most deployments of partner relationship management (PRM) automation tend to be underfunded and underdeveloped. This leads to frustration within the channel sales and support organization and, of course, a poor partner experience.
3. **Lack of a unified approach.** The channel is a complex way to go to market. While it's true that having a robust channel can not only increase reach but also provide a huge competitive edge, it takes time to develop relationships and competencies to truly be a channel leader. This is where a unified approach to partner relationship management (PRM) comes in. Organizations need to think carefully about how to set up

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partner onboarding, training, enablement and management by deploying end-to-end process steps, most of which should be fully automated to reduce variability and cost of operations. Having a unified approach also increases the self-service nature of the engagement, which not only reduces operating costs but also significantly increases partner satisfaction.

4. **Homegrown automation.** Most organizations today have some way to automate their partner relationship management (PRM) activities. Too often, however, automation is achieved by using SharePoint or some other portal as a primary interface with a document library, deal registration and other homegrown applications tied to partner training, incentives management and so on. The total cost of ownership (TCO) for patchwork arrangements like these tends to be significantly higher than for the purpose-built partner relationship management (PRM) automation platforms like ZINFI and others provide today.
5. **Lack of simplification.** We have talked about the importance of simplicity and ease of use in many previous articles. Too often a channel program gets bloated with archaic partner recruitment policies, training, incentives and demand generation programs. Premier channel organizations systematically revamp their partner relationship management (PRM) initiatives to eliminate redundant and confusing programs and process steps. This is essential for keeping partner relationship management (PRM) fresh and relevant to the partner base. Keeping things simple also reduces costs and increases transaction velocities substantially.

In summary, a thoughtful approach with a passion for continuous improvement can keep your partner relationship management (PRM) program fresh and relevant to the partner base. However, to address the ever-changing needs of a dynamic channel, it is essential to invest in an appropriate automation platform that allows organizations selling through the channel to quickly redesign and redeploy process steps. These new steps should be fully automated and end-to-end, and organizations will need to make partners aware of the changes by deploying various outbound automation and training tools. By making appropriate investments in a channel automation program that addresses the requirements for Unified Channel Management, an organization can not only build a state-of-the-art partner relationship management (PRM) program, but also drives top and bottom line success in a very logical and sequential way.

> *“The segment, Partner Relationship Management (PRM) process development and automation hasn’t really grown as fast as the marketing automation platform (MAP) or customer relationship management (CRM) segments. What is holding back the growth in deployment of partner relationship management (PRM) automation?”*

20 5 Mistakes to Avoid in Partner Relationship Management

Companies selling to the channel need to understand some of the core principles of partner relationship management. In other articles we have discussed why partner relationship management fails, and why it is important to avoid those failure modes. It is even more important to avoid a few core mistakes that many organizations make either intentionally or unintentionally. In this article we'll explore the five core mistakes that we see vendors across the channel making consistently. These are mistakes that can easily be avoided with some thought and pre-planning.

1. **Overdistribution:** If your organization is focused on partner relationship management and you want to drive high-level partner satisfaction, it is essential to make sure your partners know you care about their business and not just your own. It's common for vendors to send the wrong signal to their partner base by announcing a recruitment and expansion program. While this makes perfect sense if you are trying to expand territories where you have no presence and want to add geographies or countries where you don't currently do business, it is incredibly important to make sure in a market where you already have a presence that you don't send the wrong signal and undermine your partner relationships. One of the best ways of avoiding this kind of mistakes is to perform partner profile and potential analysis. For example, if you're selling into large countries like the US, Germany, France or the UK, and have been doing so for a while, chances are you already have a decent infrastructure for partner relationship management. If you have data that describes your partners in a great degree of detail–who they are, what their competencies are, what they do–then you can analyze your partner profiles to determine the potential of that base. Instead of recruiting more partners to go sell into those markets, you may be better off making investments with existing partners to help them sell more and become more engaged. Or you may want to focus on the partners that have potential to sell more but still haven't lived up to that potential in actual sales. You can make these distinctions by actively analyzing your partners' profiles and their potential, which will help you avoid the mistake of over-distribution.
2. **Overpromise and underdeliver:** This is a deadly sin when

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it comes to partner relationship management. Just like you, partners are busy. If you make a promise, they're going to rely on you to deliver. If you or your organization is not capable of delivery—whether it's a bug fix in the technology or improvements in B2C segments or a revised incentive structure that customers have asked for—don't try to avoid a near-term conflict by agreeing to improvements even though you know that you are unlikely to be able to deliver. Just like in any relationship, in partner relationship management overpromising destroys trust instantly. Therefore, it is better to take the bullet now rather than get completely drowned later on in mistrust and issues associated with it. You are friends with your partners. Tell them honestly why you cannot address certain problems immediately. As long as they understand that you have empathy and you have a business reason for prioritizing specific ideas and needs over others you are currently working on, they will understand. They are business people—just like you. Now, in the process you may lose certain partners, which is okay. But in the end, you're going to end up having a loyal partner base that values your open communication style. So follow the "underpromise and overdeliver" mantra–not the other way around.

3. **Complex incentive programs:** We see these mistakes related to incentives programs being made in partner relationship management again and again. This can be avoided with an annual review of your incentive structure to make sure what partners have to do to earn incentives is in alignment both with your business objectives and your partners' business objectives. You can perform this review by conducting proper surveys, hosting focus groups, and by having detailed discussions with partners to understand what's working and what's not. Of course, you need detailed tracking of the results of your incentives management program to gain insight into what worked last year and what didn't work, and when something didn't work, it is also be helpful to ask partners why. Managing incentives properly is a significant requirement and also an enabler. Rolling out complex rewards, rebates or market development fund (MDF) programs that ultimately diminish your ability to excite partners sends a message that you may be trying to avoid paying them by creating all these hurdles. You can easily avoid these mistakes simply by doing less—which will ultimately prove to be more. Limit yourself to a few simple incentives management programs under your partner relationship management infrastructure or framework and you will drive partner engagement significantly.
4. **Condoning unethical behavior:** This is a major issue in today's channel. If you know of a partner who is side-selling or trading confidential information or spending your market development funds in an improper way, you must step in. As soon as you are aware of an ethical problem, you are responsible. Believe me, you do not want these issues. Get proper legal engagement on your company site and have a formal discussion with the partner, presenting the facts that you have gathered; do not rely on hearsay. Then lay out what the offending partner needs to do to rectify the situation. If you see things are not being addressed properly, take appropriate legal and financial actions. This is an issue you cannot ignore. It can impact you personally, your entire organization and your reputation in the channel. Companies that make short-term trade-up by overlooking unethical practices sooner or later end up losing it all. We have seen that happen several times over the past couple of decades, including the failure of three large businesses because of improper practices.
5. **Insufficient channel infrastructure investment:** We live in a hypercompetitive world. Just like you, your partners want to move at the speed of digital. For them to do that, they require on-demand infrastructure that they can tap into whenever they need it. If your organization today is supporting your partner base manually—whether it's partner onboarding, partner training, lead management, deal registration or incentives management—chances are, you are not only wasting a lot of internal resources but also creating significant friction as you do business with your partners. Do not make this mistake! Is better to make an investment of $100,000 a year only to save millions and generate hundreds of millions of additional revenue with a highly satisfied partner base than to rely on antiquated, paper-based infrastructure that doesn't scale, doesn't allow you to expand your reach at a reduced cost, makes it difficult to control the brand experience, and prevents you from increasing partner satisfaction.

While these are not the only mistakes in partner relationship management that a company can make, based on what we have seen over the years these are the five fundamental mistakes that get repeated again and again and can be easily avoided with a little bit of thinking and planning ahead. Keep these mistakes in front of you and make sure that both existing employee channel employees and newly hired employees go through an orientation program to understand these how to avoid them. Apart from the tactical investment in channel infrastructure, these are guiding principles that cost you nothing, and they will undoubtedly lead to better partner relationship management across the channel.

21 Building A Thriving Channel Partner Network

When you are starting up a high growth business or launching a product line, it is always tempting to try to boost sales by building a large channel partner network, on the premise that the bigger the channel, the more zillions of your products and services they can sell. In our experience, however, many businesses attempting this model struggle to provide a sufficiently strong business proposition for multiple channel partners to carry their products and services. Furthermore, they very often end up creating channel conflict by building direct sales motions in their efforts to improve results.

Over many years, we have observed vendors' successful and unsuccessful sales approaches for hundreds of product lines, business models and go-to-market strategies. We've seen mistakes and great strategies, and excellent programs launched too soon or too late. Based on our research, I believe that vendors need to answer five key questions before investing in building out a channel.

- Do you have a clear economic model? – Whether you are planning to build a new channel partner network or redesign your existing one, it is vital to be clear about the economic proposition for partners. If you have decided on a two tier channel, i.e., selling through a distribution network to a group of resellers, then you have to take into account 5 – 10% margin sharing with the distributor, and anywhere between 10 – 50% revenue sharing with your channel partners. If you have been in the channel for a while but are looking to change things up, then you may have to rethink your legacy margin structure. In the end it all comes down to money.

In addition to your margin structure, you need to be realistic about how complex your solution is and whether a new partner can sell it with relative ease or would have to make a lot of investments such as getting their employees trained and certified, or buying equipment. So you will also have to think about how you will enable your partners to get through the initial

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ramp up investment phase in order to sell your solutions. An all-too-common mistake is to focus too much on run rate business, but ignore the support needed to get a partner up and running financially.

- Are you selling ice creams or ice cream cones? – A typical Ice cream shop sells between three to five types of cones, but fifteen to twenty types of ice cream and a dozen or so toppings. Customers buy ice cream first, and put it on a cone and then put sprinkles on. They don't go there to buy cones or sprinkles, but the add-ons add up. Middleware, switches, servers, and so on are perfect examples of add-on sales in the technology space. So, it's important for you to know whether you are providing a partner with a primary product or secondary, or add-on product. The sales motions are very different for primary as opposed to secondary products. It's often the case that partners have more choices for secondary product than for primary. In the face of stronger competition, you may have to fight harder (and pay more) to find takers to resell a secondary product through a channel partner network.

- Is there an installed base growth opportunity? – If your products and solutions require upgrades, add-ons and renewals then your partners have good reason to stay in touch with their customer base and drive land-and-expand sales. Many software products today are sold via the software-as-a-service (SaaS) model, and may even require deeper, workflow-driven customization. In these scenarios, the partners have the opportunity to provide first of all a base set of modules, but then over a period of time add more application modules or other extras. In larger scale hardware deployments, normally the first deployment starts at the end user's corporate headquarters with a proof of concept, before global roll-out. This installed base growth opportunity with its attendant requirement for a support infrastructure demands special consideration in your overall channel partner development plan and business proposition. But the rewards are high. We have repeatedly seen across our entire client base that products and solutions that require ongoing renewals, add-ons and upgrades attract the most loyal reseller network.

- Do you have a strong partnership proposition? – If a partner cannot attach multiples of four to six in terms of services revenue to every dollar of hardware and software sold, they cannot build a profitable business around your solution. Therefore, as you figure out how you will incentivize partners to sell your products and solutions, you will also need to think about how they may be able to generate incremental revenue from their customer base by offering your solutions. Typically there are seven potential touch points where a solution provider can provide products and services: – 1) define, 2) design, 3) test, 4) deploy, 5) scale, 6) manage and 7) upgrade.

For transactional products or lower value items, the revenue generated from each touch point is relatively small; however, for a larger value product and complex deployment there are plenty of profitable opportunities for a channel partner to specify your solution and provide additional services. Understanding these deployment scenarios both from an end-user and solution provider perspective is critical for you to be able to make your business proposition appealing to your partners.

- Can you ensure partner differentiation? – Once you have figured out your real economic proposition for partners, the next challenge is how will you help one partner differentiate from another when both are reselling for you. For the most part, this is not so much of an issue if you are introducing a hot solution in an under-distributed market. But at some point in time everyone will have to address the problem of over-distribution. Channel publications frequently report partners' complaints about margin losses when they are unable to differentiate and must compete on price alone.

This is where you will need to project your channel strategy two to three years forward, putting partner capability development in place from the outset, so that when market forces dictate a more competitive approach partners will be equipped to differentiate based on their domain and vertical-specific competencies rather than on price alone. Once partners are backed into a corner where they are competing on price, you will constantly hear rumblings from your channel partner network about over-distribution and uncompetitive pricing. This is a clear indication that you need to rethink your channel focus and capability development.

It takes a lot of effort, investigation and planning to ensure that all these questions are satisfactorily answered, but the results will provide more than adequate reward. Next, we'll discuss the program management questions and issues with the potential to have the most positive and negative impact on your channel built out.

When new opportunities beckon, many companies are tempted to jump in too early, and try to boost new product sales by building a massive channel partner network rather than examining whether the channel is equipped to deliver on expectations. Very often, in fact, a more discriminating approach yields better results. Previously, we discussed the necessity for channel-driven companies to balance their hopes for new products with an understanding of the economic and margin goals, the growth opportunity, the partner value proposition and their ability to ensure partner differentiation as the product matures.

In the next stage of launch preparation, the focus needs to be on how to equip the channel for long-term success. There are five key checkpoints for this phase.

1. **How will you help partners to develop?** Developing a channel partner network takes time, and few organizations are equipped or ready to wait out the time for their network to mature. More frequently, we see major changes rather than incremental adjustments to a long-term plan. As a result, many vendors suffer significant partner attrition. New partners may join with fanfare and enthusiasm, but without proper nurturing and strategic development, over time they become disgruntled and abandon the program because they feel that they are valued for fulfillment only, while the organization has no skin in the game to help the partners develop. In fact several successful ecosystems exist today, where a strategic channel partner development approach that focuses on a smaller number of partners, helping them create business plans to develop their competencies over a multi-quarter cycle really pays off. Once a partner has made investments across the sales, marketing and technical training functions, they are highly unlikely to abandon that investment by switching to another vendor simply because the cost of switching is too high. Therefore, partner development not only engenders loyalty, but also much higher long-term return than over-distribution through an underdeveloped organization. Though challenging, focus pays well, when done well.

2. **Direct or channel sales?** Once you have the entire foundational framework for your channel partner network in place, you will need to decide what you sell via the channel partner network and what you sell direct. In the early days it's usually simple to fix on one. However, as an organization grows and introduces higher value and more complex products, at times it makes sense to sell direct. The moment this happens, partners start looking at their vendors with skeptical eyes. So, you need to be very clear about how you are going to deal with this scenario when or if you do decide to sell directly to certain products or certain segments – like the federal government or major enterprise. If you do go directly, you will need to determine how you will segregate deals from a partner – and who, ultimately, wins? We have seen repeatedly that the deal registration programs that allow a partner to close rather than an internal sales team always end up with a higher partner satisfaction rate. This

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is a discussion that needs to happen sooner than later, and when it comes to the channel the better way is always early conflict and early resolution. Don't wait for things to blow up – address this upfront and head on when you are launching a new product or solution.

3. **How do you reward high performing partners?** Most companies offer some sort of partner reward program, financial or incentive-based, like President's Club or Partner Council Membership, or a combination thereof. However, clarity about how to reward different functions within an organization is critical to building the loyalty of the entire partner base. If you offer sales rewards, but no marketing or technical rewards, then there's little incentive to engage with you in other dimensions. It follows that resisting the temptation to offer multiple, product-based promotions in favor of integrated reward promotions across multiple functions will always be more effective in creating comprehensive pull through from the partner side.

4. **How do you nurture the most promising 'B' players?** Just like corporate employees, a portion of your channel partners' staff will be high performing. But it is also important to have a clear channel partner development strategy about how to take the 'B' players and convert the most promising into 'A' players. If you want to increase sales, it is much more realistic to focus nurturing a few partners rather than further recruitment of new partners into your channel. If you already have geographical coverage through your channel partner network, focusing on a few high potential players will result in much faster return. One of the ways to bring partners to a different level is to create specific management objectives for your channel partner management team and give them goals of growing revenue and competencies (technical, sales and marketing) across your mid-tier, modestly performing partners. You will also need to prune out some of your channel partners that are not meeting your performance targets by having candid conversations. Candor is always powerful in the channel – it saves a lot of time and aggravation down the road.

5. **Is your time frame realistic?** We all know that it takes one to two years for any company to build a product and service, yet many vendors expect to build a network of resellers selling new products successfully – virtually overnight. This is not realistic. It takes anywhere from six to twelve months to build initial sales out motion, and it may take another year to reap the benefit from the first year of investment. Just like product development, channel partner development requires significant upfront investment. Without conscious effort and significant investment, channel development can do more harm than good, if partners are left unsupported across their functions. So, when the time comes for you to engage in building a network, consider the first year of effort as a pure investment before you can start calling your network of resellers a profitable venture. Yes, there are exceptions, but that's rarely the case. Realistic planning and keeping your eyes on a longer-term horizon are key to creating a successful channel partner network development program.

These are complex questions and requirements, most of which require longer term planning and thinking, but this is precisely why channel partner network development must be seen as a strategic initiative with a multi-year horizon. You need a clear business plan, which should start with conducting comprehensive channel partner surveys, profiling and financial analysis; after that, development of a successful channel partner network can begin. With the right foundation, you can build a thriving program that will be the envy of your competition and that no one could duplicate overnight. That's where long-term success will come: from a group of loyal, highly capable and high performing channel partners.

> *"In our experience, many businesses attempting this model struggle to provide a sufficiently strong business proposition for multiple channel partners to carry their products and services. Furthermore, they very often end up creating channel conflict by building direct sales motions in their efforts to improve results."*

22 Definition of Unified Channel Management (UCM)

Unified Channel Management (UCM) allows a vendor organization selling through the channel to take an integrated approach by aligning channel policies, channel programs, channel people (both internal employees supporting the partner base and employees of external partners), business process automation and channel partners to build a high-performing global channel. This unified approach to channel management requires end-to-end automation of three core sub-processes:

- Partner Relationship Management (PRM) – These partner management activities focus on optimizing and automating internal partner management processes to make it easier for partners to do business with the vendor. A properly configured PRM solution significantly reduces operation costs, efficiently allocates resources behind the partners who have the highest potential for driving profitable growth and significantly increases partner satisfaction

- Partner Marketing Management (PMM) – These channel marketing activities focus on enabling channel partners to drive demand from their prospect and customer based by leveraging the vendor's marketing assets and tools. A PMM solution can help vendors optimize the use of market development funds, stimulate purpose-driven demand generation and exert control over brand extension via channel partners.

- Partner Sales Management (PSM) – These channel sales enablement activities focus on enabling both internal channel-focused resources (channel account manager, field marketing managers, distribution managers, etc.) and channel partners to close more deals faster. A properly deployed PSM solution gives marketing and sales team members insight into the effectiveness of specific marketing assets, and sales campaigns and can significantly increase sales closure rates and predictability via a distributed partner network.

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Core Modules Overview

Native Applications for Mobile Devices

The Mobile module comes with a set of mobile apps that are available for both the iOS and Android platforms. Administrators can define what applications are available via mobile app and what users have the access rights via mobile.

Identify and Access Management (IAM)

With the Identify and Access Management (IAM) module, administrators can dynamically set up and manage users, groups and granular access rights to various portal pages, applications, campaign contents and assets.

Alerts & Notification Management

The Alert module aggregates all system alerts via a unified console and allows users to set one or more notification preferences via email, SMS or mobile app. Users can also control the frequency of alerts, including individual or aggregate alerts.

Enterprise Change Management

Enterprise Change Management keeps track of all changes made to the portal related to groups, users, content, workflows, etc. This is essential for audit purposes but also for reversing changes that have been made unintentionally or intentionally.

FluidCMS™ Content Management

The FluidCMS™ module allows administrators to use drag-and-drop tools to create and manage web and campaign content to build dynamic and personalized portal pages, campaigns and other content on the fly.

Business Intelligence Reports

The Business Intelligence Reports module provides hundreds of default reports as well as tools for creating custom reports. This allows users to understand what is working and what needs improvement in channel performance/ programs at a local and global level.

FlexiFlow™ Workflow Management

Using FlexiFlow™, administrators can set up different application layouts, approval logics, alerts, reports and other functions to automate any business workflows. This capability allows organizations to dynamically adapt to rapidly changing business needs.

Centralized Interconnection (CENTRi™) Management

The CENTRi™ (Centralized Interconnection) module allows administrators to seamlessly connect to third-party applications like CRM, LMS, ERP and POS via an easy-to-use connection management and field mapping interface, including SAML 2.0 SSO.

Partners Profile Management

Partners Profile Management granularly manages partner records - accounts, contacts, performance data, etc. Using this module, organizations can segment partners effectively into groups with various parameters for optimized management capabilities.

Users & Group Management

The Users Management module allows administrators to quickly set up users and assign them to various groups and profiles. Users can be added manually or set up via group upload using Excel or third-party SSO.

Expand Modules Overview

Products Details Management

With the Products module, organizations can upload variety of product-related content for use in both marketing and sales assets and activities. This module can also be used for Configure Price Quote (CPQ) and deal registration.

Documents Library Management

Documents Library enables channel organizations to share partner-facing documents with various partner users based on status and access rights. Documents can be dynamically published and configured with expiration dates/times based on custom rules.

Projects & Tasks Management

Seamless collaboration with internal and external team members on projects and programs is easy with the Project module, which comes with tasks, notebooks, file-sharing and messaging features.

Co-Branded Assets Management

The Co-Branded Assets Management module enables an organization to provide digital assets to channel partners, who can then co-brand these assets and reuse them for various marketing- and sales-related activities.

Communicate To Partners Management

The Communicate module comes with a cluster of marketing tools, such as email, microsites, events and social, which can be used to recruit, engage and enable partners. These tools can be made available to all internal channel team members.

Partner Support Management

The Support (Help Desk) module gives organizations the tools they need to establish a structured support infrastructure for end users that extends above and beyond traditional product and services support. The module uses an industry-standard ticketing system.

Marketplace Management

Organizations can use the Marketplace to establish a list of complimentary products and services that the partners can purchase for their business use. This module provides complete order management capabilities to third-party providers.

Community & Discussions Management

The Community module enables organizations to socially connect—both internally and externally—to facilitate communication and collaboration. This module seamlessly integrates with multiple UCM modules, but it can also work in a standalone fashion.

Partner Survey Management

The Survey module can be used by anyone from the channel organization to get feedback from their partner base. Survey data can be aggregated via a reporting engine or housed individually within partner records.

Partner Locator Management

Use Partner Locator to dynamically create a partner directory - making it easy for end users to find and contact partners who offer the right solutions. All leads generated from rule-based searches are fed into the UCM Lead module for distribution to specified users.

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Partner Relationship Management (PRM)

Modules Overview

Partner Business Plans Management

The Partner Business Plans Management module enables an organization to develop business plans by working with internal and external partner stakeholders to ensure plan execution and compliance.

Deals Registration Management

Deals provides set up for deal registration criteria and workflows for their partner base using UCM's FlexiFlow and CENTRi modules. Workflows can be very simple or can cover complex, comprehensive deal registration processes.

Partner Contracts Management

The Partner Contracts Management module enables an organization to dynamically manage and keep track of all the contractual documents that channel partners sign during the various phases of the partner engagement cycle.

Rebates Management

With Rebates, set up company rebates based on various performance targets and business rules. This makes it easy to set up an application process for partners to establish eligibility for rebate programs, as well as claiming rebates.

Partner Learning Management

The Partner Learning Management module enables an organization to manage channel partner training and certification by various partner tiers and types to grow partner competencies in a systematic way through structured curricula.

Partner Leads Management

Partner Leads Management enables lead distribution to your partner base and manages the entire "contacts to contracts" process. It can help engage partner sales reps via round robin, shark tank and other lead management strategies.

Partner Onboarding Management

Partner Onboarding Management automates partner recruitment and onboarding processes via step-by-step activities. Based on partner type, engagement and other variables, you can create different onboarding tracks.

Market Development Funds (MDF) Management

Market Development Funds Management enables organizations to allocate MDF and co-op funds to partners. Its also used to help partners apply for program funding and claim compensation through proper proof of execution.

Partner Marketing Management (PMM)

Modules Overview

Search Marketing Management

The Search Marketing Management module provides dynamic linkage between paid ad (Google AdWords, Facebook, etc.) search network and marketing campaigns, and is used for multi-partner inbound integrated lead generation.

Microsite & Landing Page Management

The Microsite & Landing Page Management module enables an organization to set up co-branded microsites or landing pages. This allows partners to engage their prospects and customers via single-touch or multi-touch digital drip campaigns.

Social Syndication Management

The Social Syndication Management module enables an organization to syndicate social media content via the channel partner network. Partners can autostream or manually customize each social feed for instant or delayed posting.

Event Marketing Management

Event Marketing Management enables an organization to set up trigger-ready multi-touch "event in a box" campaigns that can be quickly co-branded and customized, allowing channel partners to engage their prospects/customer base.

Direct Mail Marketing Management

The Direct Mail module allows for set up of co-branded direct mail templates for partner use in the form of post cards, brochures and other formats. This module can also be connected to national printers for seamless shipping and mailing.

Web Syndication Management

Web Syndication Management enables distribution of product and solution web showcases via a partner's website. Web syndication amplifies organizational reach and lead generation through a distributed channel partner network.

Email Marketing Management

The Email Marketing Management module enables an organization to set up multi-touch co-branded emails. These emails create the foundation of various integrated campaigns, whether they lead to microsites, events, syndication or call campaigns.

Multi-Touch Campaign Management

The Campaign Library module enables channel organizations to provide co-brandable, single- or multi-tactic campaigns to its partner network through a user-friendly, logical interface searchable by keywords and tags.

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Partner Sales Management (PSM)

Modules Overview

Rapid Dialer Management

The Rapid Dialer Management module provides a high-volume automated dialing capability to partner sales reps for more efficient telemarketing. The module makes it easy for reps to follow up on leads and develop sales qualified opportunities.

Buyers Engagement Management

The Buyers Engagement Management module provides tools for channel sales reps and their partner reps for sending digital content such as emails, landing pages and solution showcases to prospects, and for tracking engagement.

Configure Price Quote (CPQ) Management

The Configure Price Quote (CPQ) module enables an organization to offer special pricing and quotes approval mechanisms for partner sales reps, channel reps and channel management team members.

Channel Data Management (CDM)

The Channel Data Management module enables an organization to access point-of-sales data from distributors and resellers to track performance by region, territory, reseller and product, and to proactively manage inventory.

Sales Gamification Management

The Sales Gamification Management module enables an organization to promote various sales rewards programs. Organizations can use a leaderboard to stimulate competition and drive rep engagement in a virtual environment.

Commissions Management

Both internal channel teams and external partners can use the Commission model to align with quarterly programs, campaigns and run rate business. Users can set up business logic with UCM's FlexiFlow module.

Sales Rewards Management

Sales Rewards allows set up of channel sales programs for internal/external users & progress tracking in a unified interface. This module also allows filing of reward claims & stack ranking status. The logic is built via UCM's FlexiFlow module.

Sales Desk Management

The Sales Desk module seamlessly integrates with the Leads, Deals, Support and CPQ modules to provide a unified dashboard for order management. Both internal and external users can access this dashboard to communicate and track status.

About ZINFI

ZINFI Technologies, the leader in Unified Channel Management (UCM) innovation, enables vendors and their channel partners to achieve profitable growth predictably and rapidly on a worldwide level. Headquartered in Silicon Valley, USA and founded by channel veterans with extensive global channel management experience, we at ZINFI see an immense opportunity to build high-performing sales channels by deploying an easy-to-use, comprehensive Unified Channel Management platform that streamlines and manages the entire partner lifecycle.

ZINFI's Unified Channel Management innovation incorporates three core state-of-the-art SaaS applications—partner relationship management automation, partner marketing management automation and partner sales management automation. In 26 countries, these three core UCM SaaS applications are also locally supported by ZINFI's global marketing services team members.

ZINFI's Unified Channel Management solutions enable organizations selling via the channel to integrate the full spectrum of channel partner management activities—from recruitment, onboarding, training and certification to lead management, co-branded demand generation, sales performance and success, and on to fulfillment and renewal management. Powered by the efficacy and superior experience of ZINFI's UCM solutions, any organization can build a high-performing channel and realize increased partner sales return on investment.

The word ZINFI, to us, means Zero to Infinity—reflecting our mission to enable customers, employees and communities to realize their infinite potentials. In its most applied form in our day-to-day existence, the word refers to an analytical and mathematical approach to marketing and sales methodologies, an approach that allows our customers to realize the true potential of their own products and services and to continuously grow their business via the channel.

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