

Communication, Communication, Communication



With technology companies selling up to **90 per cent** of their products **via the IT channel**, this audience has become a vital part of marketing strategy.

Channel Rising

The Channels prominent rise has caught Vendors napping, and they now need to adjust their marketing activities to ensure that 'communication, communication, communication' is the mantra, and that this critical audience is receiving the information, education and attention that it deserves.

Enterprise Saturation

Evidence suggests that the enterprise marketplace is becoming increasingly saturated for technology companies, and there has been a growing need to look elsewhere for business development. IT vendors are increasingly turning their sales focus to the mid-market and small business sectors, as the direct-sales model is neither practical nor scalable. This shift away from the direct-sales approach to a channel centric model, means that marketing must take the lead when developing the relationship with the vendor. Subsequently, adding to the burden of the already stretched channel marketing department.

Efficient and responsive channel communications are a key strategic objective, but juggling partner programs and ongoing communications demands a significant time investment from both development and management.

Diverse Audience

This balancing act is exacerbated by a diverse channel partner target audience, spread across numerous tiers and types of partners and constituting a country, regional and EMEA remit. This scenario assumes that communications are developed only on the basis of partner type and geography, without further profiling down to individual job functions and preferences.

Contaminated Data

Internal channel data can hinder the process of intelligent channel communications. Databases are often not profiled sufficiently to permit a segmented channel approach, and quarterly defined channel marketing budgets can force marketers to develop generic communications. The crucial objective is to develop an intelligent

communication strategy that works with the channel audience.

The Correct Messages

It is vital to get this foundation right to ensure that vendors reach all the right partner organisations and the key individuals associated within them, with the right messages and pertinent information. Vendors should augment their database with organisational and individual profiles, enabling the tailoring of future communications on the basis of personal preferences. These preferences should also define the content, medium and frequency of communications.

Using a good content management system can simplify the process further, allowing multiple editors to provide content, and 'flagging' relevance (based upon defined criteria such as technical and event content) accordingly. Providing customised information to the channel will lead to increased response rates, vendor engagement and partner satisfaction.

Mixed Media Approach

The final challenge is to devise a mixture of media for partner communications. The limited channel marketing budget often forces channel marketers to consider online communications only, whereas an offline/online strategy significantly increases receptiveness within a crowded channel marketplace. Online communications can be very effective, but click-through rates show that they are most successful if email is the chosen medium for communication.

Rapidly Changing Landscape

The channel marketing communications landscape has changed rapidly, and channel marketers need to ensure that they are supported to deal with the challenging situation. With profiles and preferences defined by their target audience, presenting relevant content to the right individuals, channel marketers can ensure that they develop strong relationships with the channel, and fill the direct-sales vacuum. A well-founded and consistent approach is the basis for a successful communication strategy.

Established in 1997, Planet is a full service B2B marketing services agency, specialising in IT & Telecoms. The company delivers intelligent and complete channel marketing strategy, program design, development and execution, as well as technology solutions to improve the effectiveness of sales and marketing. Planet works with many of the IT industry's largest organisations, including Symantec, EMC Corporation and Juniper Networks, along with small niche providers, channel partners and entrepreneurial start-ups across EMEA.

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