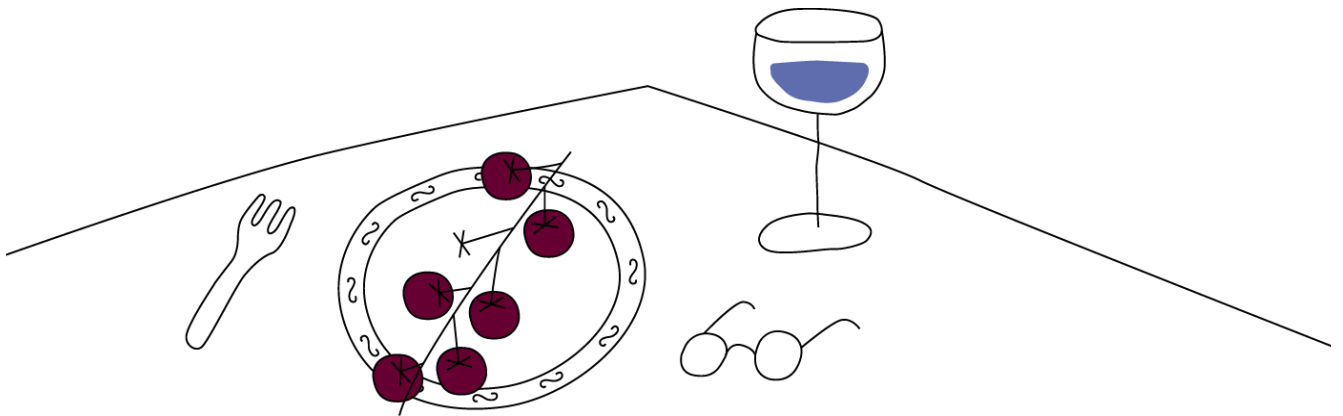


A Set the Table Guide

Creating an Agency Partner Program within an eCommerce SaaS Organization

WITH JESS GOULART AND RACHEL FEFER



Building a partnership program can take your organization to the next level. But sometimes it's difficult to know where to start. We've partnered with Rachel Fefer and Jess Goulart, architects of Bloomreach's agency partner program to help you get started on your journey in partnerships. In this series, we'll dive deep into how agency partner programs work, setting the foundation for your own program, mapping your partnership journey, and documenting processes to ensure success in your partner program.



Meet your expert

Rachel Fefer

Rachel Fefer is a channel sales leader who has built and grown successful channel programs.

Currently, Rachel leads the

Americas Channel Sales organization at Bloomreach. Prior to that, Rachel held alliance, sales, and marketing roles at other digital experience software companies including Adobe, Magento, Gorgias, Oracle,

and LivePerson. Rachel has an MBA from Bar Ilan University in Israel, and a BA from Syracuse University's Newhouse School.



Meet your expert

Jess Goulart

Jess Goulart has worked in digital experience partnerships for over a decade spanning the brand, software, and services

side of the technology industry. She specializes in building successful partner ecosystems and is currently managing the agency partner team at Bloomreach and helping them transform into a "partner first"

organization. Prior to that, she worked in enterprise partnerships at Adobe where she helped her partner achieve Adobe's coveted "Partner of The Year" award, and before that, she built out the global alliances and partner marketing program at BORN Group, a top global digital eCommerce agency that was acquired by Tech Mahindra in 2019.



Meet your host

Phillip Jackson

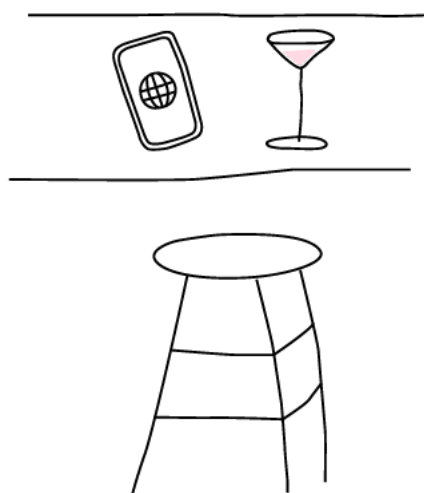
Phillip Jackson is the Co-founder and CEO of Future Commerce. Phillip helps brands to define commerce goals,

create digital strategies to meet those goals, and align tactics that drive results. With over 15 years of experience creating unique online customer experiences, he has both built and managed eCommerce for some of the

world's most recognizable brands.

What you'll learn in this series:

- The importance of building a partner program
- Different commercial models for agency partner programs
- Four steps for building a data-driven partner program
- How to map the partner journey to ensure success
- Tips for driving revenue through your partner program.



LESSON 1

Defining the “What” and the “Why” of Agency Partner Programs

Investing in partnerships is not just beneficial; it's essential for the growth and sustainability of a SaaS business. In this first lesson, we'll define some common terms, walk through common agency commercial models, and highlight the benefits of having partner programs.

SI, Agency, Solution Partner... What's in a Name?

In eCommerce, you often hear many different terms thrown out, and oftentimes it can get a little bit confusing. In partner programs, you may hear the terms, **SI (System Integrator)**, **Agency**, and **Solution Partner** used interchangeably. They are all fairly synonymous, although may have some nuanced differences, depending on who you're talking to.

SI or System Integrator

A service, entity, or partner that focuses on creating cohesive systems by integrating software, hardware, and networking components, aiming to enhance efficiency and performance for their clients.

Agency

Emphasizes customer experiences and journeys, requiring a team skilled in marketing, data analysis, front-end development, design, and UX.

Solution Partner

Another interchangeable term for Agency, depending on the audience.

Different Commercial Models, Different Approaches

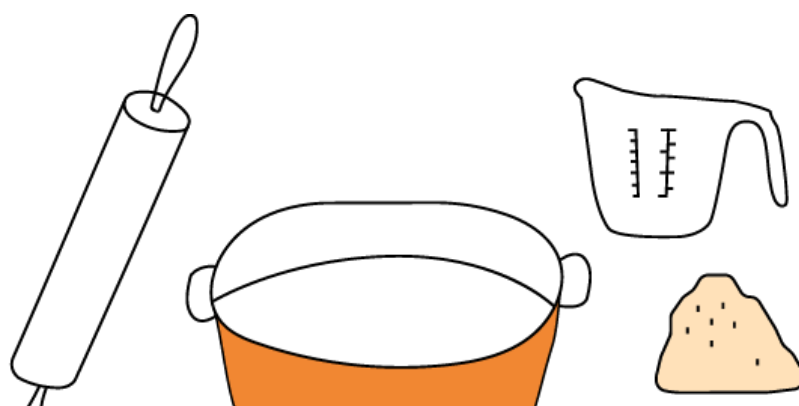
With “SI,” “Agency,” and “Solution Partner” used interchangeably, what is most important to determine when working with agencies is the commercial model a specific agency employs. Here are four commercial models you will run into:

Referral Model	This model is the most common. It involves the partner earning a percentage of the software vendor’s annual contract value, fostering a direct relationship between the SaaS vendor and the end customer (the merchant).
Reseller Model	In this model, the agency, or SI, acts as the intermediary, selling the SaaS solution to its customers. The agency can often access markets outside the SaaS vendor’s reach, however, the agency holds the contract with the end customer, and the SaaS provider does not communicate with the customer.
Agency Model	The Agency acts on behalf of the end customer, leveraging the SaaS product itself to drive value for the end customer. Agencies use the SaaS product to deliver value to their clients, often owning their instance of the product and benefiting from volume discounts.
Affiliate Model	In this final model, agencies act similarly to influencers, marketing SaaS products digitally, and earning commissions for conversions through advertising and linking to the software vendor’s site.

What is an Agency Partner Program?

Now that we’ve laid our foundation by defining agency commercial models, let’s delve into the core of this lesson: What is an agency partner program, and why is it crucial for SaaS organizations?

An agency partner program is a structured approach for partners to promote, sell, and implement SaaS solutions. It includes onboarding, commission structures, marketing funds, technical support, and a partner portal for resources and financial tracking.



The Importance of Agency Partner Programs

Consider these compelling statistics:

- Microsoft sees [95% of its revenue](#) through its partners.
- Shopify's partner ecosystem generated over [\\$6.9 billion in 2019](#).
- Channel partners contributed to [approximately 40% of Zoom's business](#) in Japan in 2020.
- Atlassian's ecosystem includes [numerous channel partners](#), accounting for 1/3 of its business.

Benefits of Agency Partner Programs

As you can see, a partner program provides companies with a cost-effective channel for driving revenue. It supports the software vendor throughout the sales lifecycle, by helping close business, implementing, and providing ongoing upsell and cross-sell opportunities.



“If you're a software vendor that doesn't have a built-out agency program, it will be the Wild West for you. You're not gonna be able to show measured driven revenue in any, concrete way... And there's no infrastructure for your agency partners to exist in and interact with your business in so you're not going to be top of mind for your agency partners.”

Jess Goulart

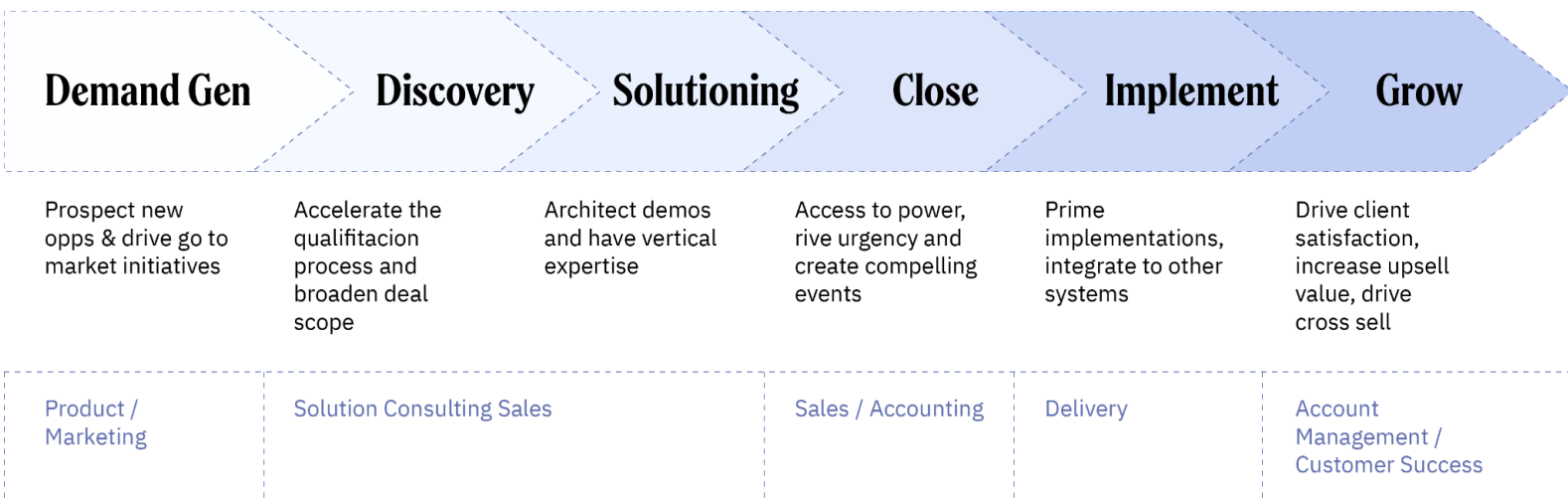


Some specific benefits of a partner program include:

- **Sourced Revenue:** Partners bring opportunities at a reduced customer acquisition cost, leveraging their networks and marketing efforts.
- **Influenced Revenue:** Co-selling with partners enhances win rates, offering diverse perspectives and filling product gaps with complementary software or customizations.
- **Improved Win Rate and Expanded Deal Size:** Partner involvement can significantly increase win rates and deal sizes.
- **Better Retention:** Agencies maintain close relationships with clients, providing valuable insights and early warnings about potential issues with the SaaS product.

Partners Help Bloomreach's Customer LifeCycle

An inside look at how Bloomreach's Partner Program aids in the Customer LifeCycle



Property of Jess Goulart and Rachel Fefer, Bloomreach Partner Program

Key Takeaways



Agency partner programs are essential for SaaS businesses, providing a cost-effective channel for driving revenue.



Building a partner program requires a strategic approach to selecting and engaging with partners based on their commercial model. Agencies operate under one of the following commercial models: Referral Model (most common), Reseller Model, Agency Model, or Affiliate Model



Partner programs enhance win rates, deal sizes, and customer retention through diverse perspectives and co-selling.



The value of a partner program extends beyond immediate revenue, impacting long-term customer relationships and market positioning.

LESSON 2

Setting the Foundations for Your Agency Partner Program

Building a successful Agency Partner Program is a data-driven process that requires careful planning and execution. Now that we've answered the question of why Partner Programs are beneficial, we'll take this lesson to guide you through the foundational steps necessary to build a robust and effective partner program. Jess and Rachel have defined four steps for building a partner program. By following these four steps, you can lay a strong foundation for a program that not only aligns with your business goals but also fosters fruitful partnerships.

Step 1: Define Your KPIs

The success of any partner program hinges on well-defined Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

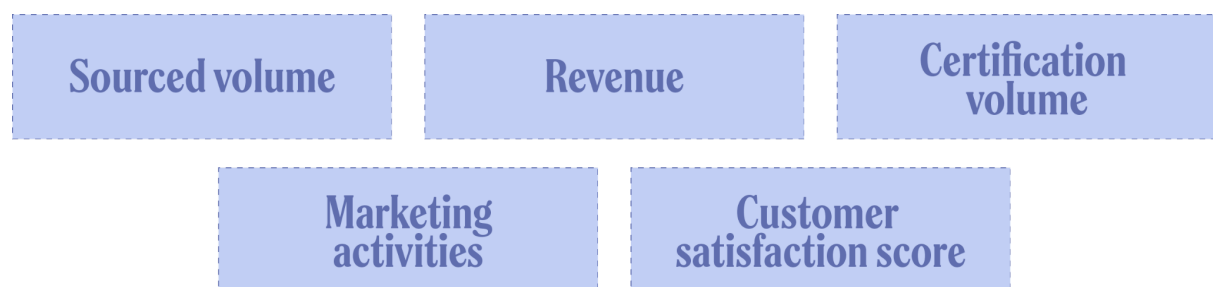
Internally, for your own Partner team, these KPIs may include:

- **Volume of Sourced Opportunities:** The number of qualified opportunities brought by agencies.
- **Revenue Value of Qualified Sourced Pipeline:** The annual contract value of sales accepted pipeline. This includes sourced revenue and influenced revenue.
- **Volume of New Recruited Partners:** Particularly crucial for new programs aiming to build a network.
- **Partner-led Upsell or Cross-sell:** For more mature programs, in cases where multiple products are sold or features are added to an account, the agency aids in selling those additional features.
- **Customer Retention:** Also for more mature programs, measuring renewed contracts or values influenced by the agency partner.



For external partner programs, consider building your program to accommodate tiering systems that help drive healthy competition and action to achieve higher tiering. Programs mature as the business matures, so expect your KPIs to grow and mature over time, and be sure to communicate KPIs to your partners often. Early-stage programs might focus their KPIs on recruitment and building a network, while mature programs may implement tiers to reward top-performing partners.

For your external efforts, partner program requirements should include KPIs in the following categories:



Step 2: Demonstrate Your Value

To your partners and their customers.

It's pivotal to articulate the value of your product to your partners and their customers. Ask yourself:

- How does your solution aid partners in delivering value to their clients?
- How does partnering with your organization help partners achieve their own goals?
- What immediate and long-term values does the partnership offer?

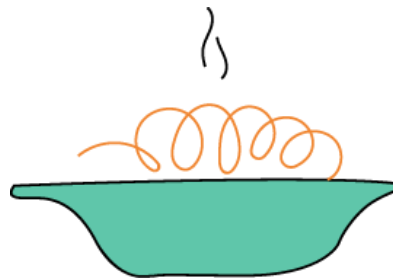
Consider the broader ecosystem and how your product fits into larger projects or tech stacks that partners might be working on.

You need to be able to answer these questions. Internally, your partner team needs to thoroughly understand these questions and how your product is a solution. Externally, your program should answer these concisely and your partner managers need to communicate these values to existing and potential partners with ease.

Step 3: Identify Your Ideal Partner Profile

Not all partners will align with your business goals. Identifying the ideal partner profile involves considering factors like:

- **Customer Overlap:** Does the partner's customer base match your ideal customer profile (ICP)?
- **Partner Size and Reach:** Assess whether the partner's size and geographic reach align with your business needs.
- **Investment and Commitment:** Gauge the partner's willingness to invest time and resources in the partnership.
- **Technical Expertise and Cultural Fit:** Ensure that the partner's skills and company culture align with yours.



Step 4: Show the Business Value of Your Program

Demonstrating the impact of your partner program to company stakeholders is crucial. There are several dashboards that you can create to showcase impact. Jess and Rachel suggest three comparison dashboards to measure impact:

- **Channel Comparisons:** Partner vs. Non-Partner
 - Compare partner-sourced business with non-partner sources in terms of win rates, conversion rates, time to close, and total ARR.
- **Partner Manager Performance**
 - Individual partner manager's performance against their KPIs.
- **Partner Comparisons**
 - Evaluate partners based on the volume of sourced and influenced revenue and retention rates.

Managing Data and Tools

Managing the vast amount of data in a partner program requires robust tools. One essential tool is a platform like Crossbeam, which helps in reporting overlaps between partner managers and account executives. This tool is vital in uniting internal and external data sources, ensuring that all stakeholders have the insights they need to make informed decisions.



Example of a shared Crossbeam dashboard for Partner Managers

Key Takeaways



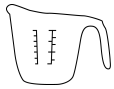
Precisely defined KPIs are essential for tracking and guiding a partner program's success.



KPIs will be ever-evolving as your company and your program grows. Be flexible and grow your goals with your program.



Effective partner programs require a balance between internal team management and external partner engagement.



Partner Managers are the champions for your company to your partners and the champions of your partner program to the broader team. Constant and precise communication is a necessary trait for partner teams.

LESSON 3

Mapping the Internal and External Partner Journey

Now that we've established the foundations of an agency partner program, it's time to delve into the intricacies of the partner journey. This journey is a two-sided narrative, encompassing both the internal mechanisms driving the program and the external experiences of the partners.

Backward Design Your Partner Journey

Backward design is a concept often used in educational settings for creating lesson plans. Using the backward design method, educators begin by imagining desired outcomes and then engineer lessons and milestones needed to achieve that goal. When establishing your partner program, you should take the same approach. Think first about your external motion, what your partners will experience, and the goals you'll set for them, and then examine your internal efforts and how you'll design your program to achieve those outcomes.

Because this journey is two-sided, we've designed an easy-to-read chart to help you as you develop your internal and external journeys. As we walk through this lesson, we'll backward design, examining each stage of the journey from the external partner journey first, then the internal motions to accompany that stage in the journey.

Internal Motion		External Partner Journey
Recruit	→	Join
Onboard	→	Onboard

Enable	→	Learn
GTM	→	Win
Implement	→	Implement

Recruit → Join

External: Recruit → Join

Looking externally first, at this stage of the journey, your partner is going to join your program. You as a partner manager have approached this partner and they have decided that they want to learn more. In this stage, you as a partner manager want to educate your potential partner about the benefits of your program, how your partner program is structured, how to use your software or product, and your unique offering for your customers.

A few key pieces at this stage of the journey include:

- Discussions on the nature of your partnership
- Identifying goals for each partner and shared interests
- Partner Contract (which should include the terms of the commercial model for this partnership)

Internal: Recruit → Join

Your internal motions in this stage should involve a lot of recruiting. At this stage, your partnerships team should research, identify, and vet potential partners. This stage requires a lot of research around what platform they are part of (Shopify, Adobe Commerce, BigCommerce), what tools they utilize, and how your product fits in with these tools. If you find and vet a good fit, your team needs to clearly define the benefits of partnering prior to approaching or meeting with that partner. You need to develop clear guidelines, rules, and expectations for the engagement, otherwise your partnership could get messy.

Onboard → Onboard

We wanted to make it easy for you to remember this section of the journey so we gave both sides the same name. In all seriousness, though, these have similar processes for both your external journey and internal motions.

External: Onboard → Onboard

This is your first “at bat” with your partner so you want to launch strongly. Putting myself into the shoes of your partner, I want to make sure that I have access to all of the great tools and benefits that you promised me in this partnership. I want to make sure that I—and the rest of my sales team—gain access to your partner portal. I need to know how to register a new deal and how to communicate with you. If I need something, who do I reach out to? Are you helping me align with your organization as a whole and are you equipping me to be a representative of yours to my clients? Do we have a shared dashboard and foundation to start account mapping and identifying potential customers?

Internal: Onboard → Onboard

Internally, your team should have a set process for getting your new partner into your system, creating a shared communication style, and training them on your product. This is a never-ending process but there are some basics you should tackle right away:

- Get your partner listed in a partner directory
- Establish communication norms and channels
- Introduce your partner to key people within your organization
- Set clearly defined, mutually beneficial goals for your relationship

In setting your goals, think short term as well as long term. Audacious, long-term goals can be intimidating. Be sure to set some short-term goals that can be won quickly and build from those.

Enable → Learn

External: Enable → Learn

This is possibly the most important piece of the successful partnership puzzle. Your goal in this phase should be to utilize your partner as an extension of your own sales team and to equip them with the confidence to really sell your product.

Partners sell the product they know best

At this phase, your partner wants to learn everything there is to know about your product. You want to make sure that not only your partner manager is well-versed in your product but their sales team has access to your training materials and your partnership portal. You want to make sure your partners are incentivized to learn about your product. You want to inspire your partner to put in the time and effort needed to reach the level of expertise where they're comfortable with your product. Keep your partner engaged in training through content drips, quarterly updates, and ongoing enablement series. You also want to provide your partner with access to a sandbox in which they can play with your product

without the fear of breaking anything. This will ensure they learn the ins and outs of your product.

Internal: Enable → Learn

Internally, you need to build resources to enable your partners to get as comfortable with your product and your team as possible. Not only do partners sell the product they know best, they sell the product built by the people they like best. In this phase, your team should build and create ways for your partners to learn your product in their preferred learning method, whether that's through video snippets, workshops, sandboxes, or long-form educational series.

GTM → Win

External: GTM → Win

We all want to win right? The first win is always the hardest. You should plan to be deep in the trenches with your partner to achieve your first win. But once you get that first win, make sure you celebrate! Shout it from the rooftops. Once you have that first win, the momentum builds. You've found that working formula so you need to take it and replicate it in order to find more wins. Put together some case studies and testimonials to learn what elements lead to your win.

Internal: GTM → Win

Wins and your go-to-market (GTM) strategy are interdependent. Your wins should always inform and reinforce your GTM strategy. From your wins, you will want to focus on creating repeatable use cases to drive success. On the flip side, if you aren't succeeding with a particular agency partner, you want to be wary about building a GTM strategy with them. Work closely with your partners, sales team, and partner marketing team to create content that your partners can share with their customers.

Implement → Implement

External: Implement → Implement

Winning isn't the end of your journey. After winning business, it is your job as a partner manager to make sure your partners are successful in helping implement your software for your new customers. This phase can get incredibly complex. Your partner needs to have the proper support from your team to help them implement your software successfully so that

your customers are happy with your product long-term. You also want to set up your customers with proper training to learn how to use your software.

Internal: Implement → Implement

Internally, you need to have an implementation plan. Do you have a dedicated implementation team? Who do your new customers contact if they have issues with your product? What training do you give to your customers? How much do you customize your product to your customer's needs?

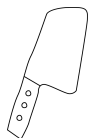
A Holistic Approach

Mapping both the internal and external partner journeys is essential for building a robust agency partner program. By understanding and aligning these two perspectives, you create a program that not only drives business success but also fosters strong, lasting partnerships. This holistic approach is what sets apart a good partner program from a great one.

Key Takeaways



The success of an agency partner program hinges on a well-structured partner journey.



This journey should be backward designed, thinking first of your external partners' journey and then crafting your internal team's journey. Alignment between the two will ensure a cohesive partnership.



Continuous learning and support are vital for partners. Your partner program should provide ongoing resources, training, and updates to keep partners well-informed and skilled in advocating for and implementing your product.



Your partner program should be adaptable and responsive to the needs and feedback of the partners. Don't be afraid to iterate this journey. Flexibility will ensure that the program remains relevant and effective, fostering a dynamic and evolving partnership that can withstand market changes and challenges.



LESSON 4

Driving Revenue with Tips for Partner Managers to Succeed

Driving revenue through a partner program is a multifaceted endeavor. It requires a well-crafted playbook, a strategy that aligns internal processes with external engagements, and a team capable of fostering deep, meaningful partnerships. With these elements, the path to success becomes a well-navigated journey. In this last lesson of the series, we decided it would be beneficial to provide you with a speed round of practical, non-negotiable ingredients to get your partner program off the ground and drive revenue.

Tip #1: Create a Partner Program playbook to document best practices

Consider this playbook as the cornerstone of your partner program. It's a comprehensive guide, a compendium of best practices that navigates partner managers through the intricacies of both internal operations and external partner engagements. It's akin to a master chef's recipe book – essential and detailed.

Some key categories your playbook should include:

Recruiting & Contract Guides	This section lays the groundwork for partner selection and legal formalities. It's about establishing clear criteria and ensuring all legalities are meticulously documented.
Welcome & Onboarding Checklists	Here, the focus is on integrating partners into the ecosystem. From social media announcements to joint business plans, it's about creating a welcoming and productive environment.
Enablement & Delivery Documentation	This crucial phase involves empowering partners with knowledge and resources. It's about transforming partners into proficient advocates of your product.
Sales & AE Alignment Processes	This section aims to synchronize your sales force with the partners' objectives and includes items like sales stages, Crossbeam training, discovery questions, and partner spotlight series for AEs.

GTM (Go to Market) Guides	This is where marketing strategies are honed. It encompasses everything from event planning to co-marketing initiatives to partner opt-in guidelines, ensuring that partners are well-equipped for market penetration.
Management & Reporting Resources	This final piece of the playbook is about supporting partners and tracking the partnership's progress through detailed reporting. It should include joint activity templates, co-owned reports and dashboards, lead and deal registration information, and commission and referral fee processes.

The playbook's structure mirrors the stages of the partner journey, reflecting a deliberate and strategic alignment. It's a thoughtful orchestration of internal processes to enhance the external partner experience.

Tip #2: Maintain a joint tracking document for each partnership.

Creating and maintaining a joint tracking document is crucial. This comprehensive approach focuses on marketing, enablement, sales, and deployment. The philosophy here is to keep plans simple yet effective, grounded in the SMART goals framework. Time is a limited, and therefore valuable, resource. Having a shared tracking document for your partnership will save both teams precious time to stay on the same page for your partnership.

Tip #3: Give to Get

Engaging high-value partners requires a symbiotic relationship where understanding and meeting your partner's goals is as important as achieving your own. Remember, partnerships thrive on familiarity and trust, not merely on the merits of the product.



**"You gotta give to get. Partnership is a two-way street...
It's not just about you and your organization. It's about
what the partner wants and needs to be successful...
So always think about their needs and how you can serve
them just as much as your own goals."**

Rachel Fefer



Tip #4: Partners sell what they know and who like

Not necessarily the best product.

Your greatest asset as a partner manager is building relationships. Stay in front of your partners consistently through multiple channels (lunch & learns, slack channels, events, gifting campaigns, email). Ensure that they don't only know one person on your team. Your partners should know multiple people in your organization, and your team should know multiple people in their organization.

A successful partnership strategy involves penetrating beyond the partner manager level. It's about establishing connections across various tiers of the partner's organization, from sales teams to leadership, ensuring a deep-rooted and multifaceted relationship.

Tip #5: Your team is your greatest asset

We covered this in our series, *Set the Table: Building Highly Effective Teams* with Jon Klonsky: your team will make or break your business. In hiring partner managers, look for individuals with a blend of ecosystem acumen, organizational skills, and a background in sales or marketing. These individuals should possess an executive presence, capable of engaging with high-level executives and becoming trusted advisors.

Key Takeaways



Creating a comprehensive partner program playbook is essential for documenting best practices and guiding partner managers.



Hiring the right partner managers with a blend of ecosystem knowledge, organizational skills, and executive presence is key to building successful partnerships.



Partners are people. They will sell based on relationship and knowledge of your product. Continual communication, relationship building, and education will make your partner program a key driver of company revenue.





Set the Table

The Recipe for Building a Successful Partner Program

1. Define the “what” and the “why” of your agency partnership program
2. Set the foundation for the partner program
3. Map the internal and external partner journey.
4. Identify and document your best practices in your partner playbook.

